JUNE

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BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for **MEN**, *by* **MEN**

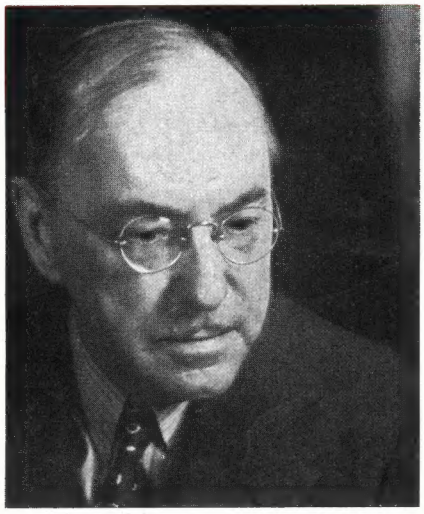
Just What Happened . . . . *by GELETT BURGESS*
A "Believe It or Not" murder mystery

Apache Ranger . . . . . *by JAY LUCAS*
A complete book-length novel

Nightingale in Port Said . . *by WILLIAM MAKIN*
She sang while the bombs were falling

Who's Who *in this* Issue

Gelett Burgess

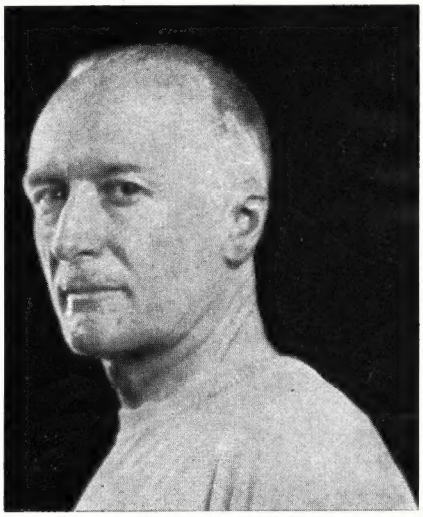


GELETT BURGESS was graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and after three years in the engineering department of the Southern Pacific Railway, became an instructor in the University of California. After gayly pulling down in San Francisco the anomalous and tawdry statue of a patent-medicine doctor, he left the faculty by request.

He broke into literature by the side entrance, publishing and editing a spirited little magazine called *The Lark*. It was his poem on "The Purple Cow," in the first number, that brought him into notice. He has become widely known not only as a humorist, but as a writer for children, as a poet, novelist and essayist of originality and versatility.

The best known of Gelett Burgess' recent works are, "Look Eleven Years Younger," an analytical study of youthfulness, and two murder mystery novels, "Two O'clock Courage," and "Ladies in Boxes."

Manning de V. Lee



I WAS born in that sweet land of live oaks, camellias and alligators, the coast country of South Carolina. At the age of four the War with Spain broke out, and my earliest recollections are of blue-coated soldiers tramping endlessly by our front gate. My father was then a brigadier-general of National Guard cavalry, and the house seemed always full of clanking sabers.

Naturally, my first feeble attempts at art were confined to battle scenes, complete with gore.

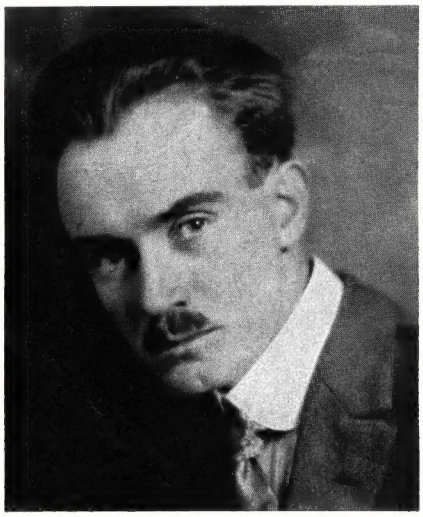
In 1917, after service on the Mexican border with the Virginia Field Artillery, the Army sent me to France as a lieutenant, where I rather expected to be able to authenticate those sanguinary details through actual experience. In all those eighteen months, however, I saw no warring chargers, no bloody banners. Being in the artillery, we never even saw what we were shooting at.

Art training was at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Went abroad again in 1921 on a European Scholarship that carried me through England, France, Switzerland and Italy. Back to school and the winning of the second Toppan Prize. Cash, and how I needed it!

Illustration has claimed me ever since: magazines, books (about 150 to date) and advertising.

Ride horseback when I can, but a 32-acre place with no outside help, and a full-to-busting program of art work, leaves me no leisure.

Jay Lucas



"FANG OF THE WOLF," was the first story Jay Lucas wrote for us. In 1925, it was, that he sent it in to us from Arizona, along with a letter telling about himself. "The worst they call me now," he wrote, "is 'Cougar Joe,' but when I was younger and wilder, they had other names for me."

Born in England, he came to this country as a boy, and was a Texas cowboy when youth and the Army doctors wouldn't let him have a share in the first World War. Badly disappointed, he went off into the Arizona mountains, "dug a hole and pulled it in after him." That is to say, for eight years he lived almost a hermit life as a professional hunter of mountain lion and other predatory animals.

Since that time he has used his peculiar and intimate knowledge of the wilderness West to win success as a writer. He is married; and until recently, when a fire wrecked his house, has lived on his home place in Arizona. . . . His novel "Apache Ranger" begins on page 106.

BLUE BOOK

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Highlights of the New Books
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Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

Except for articles and stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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READERS' COMMENT*

FROM STATION KSOO

As a BLUE BOOK *reader of many years' standing, may I reply to Bernard C. Peake's recent letter?*

Mr. Peake suggested more non-fiction features. I hope you issue an editorial "no" to such suggestions.

Let's keep BLUE BOOK *as it is—a mental sanctuary where news and trend analysts, economic experts, predictors for posterity and publicity-seeking axgrinders are "persona non grata."*

While I hold no brief for pure "escape" literature, I do maintain that the news-stands are flooded with books, magazines and "digests" devoted entirely to fact and non-fiction.

Surely Mr. Peake and his "no time for fiction" friends can find what they want there. . . . Sir—the defense rests!

Don Harvey,
Sioux Falls, So. Dakota.

WE WHO HAVE FOUGHT

I seldom "go off the deep end" over a story, but Michael Gallister's "We Who Have Fought" is the most powerful thing I have read in years.

Sometime ago a soldier wrote in a letter published in BLUE BOOK: *"Courage is fear that has said its prayers"; "We Who Have Fought" shows that sort of courage in pioneer America.*

The Government should award Mr. Gallister an "E"—and another to BLUE BOOK *for printing this story.*

George E. Taylor.

THE SAILOR *LIKES* SERIALS

I am not a yes man. I must say, though, I agree with the editor and not with Bill Zaleski (March issue).

I've been reading the BLUE BOOK *since 1929 when I sailed on the U.S.S. Ceder in Alaska, a one-hundred-day cruise from Ketchikan to Dutch Harbor and back, fishing lights and buoys from the briny deep, and supplying lighthouses with what it takes.*

I've never missed a copy, and I will continue to ante my two-bits, and hope you will continue the continued stories like "From Some Higher Place," "His Back to the Sea," and "Pooch."

No, Mr. Editor, don't pass up stories like that because they are too long for one printing.

J. W. Prouty, Auburn, Calif.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned; and all will become property of McCall Corporation. Address: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

Just What Happened

"Believe it or not," says the author.

by Gelett Burgess

I AM TO BE EXECUTED TOMORROW for the murder of Carlo Blune. I didn't murder him; but I admit that I was indirectly and unwittingly the cause of his death.

Hunter, and his girl he called Buttsky, know that I tried only to save Carlo. But to save their own lives, they both swore that I pushed him out the window.

As soon as he fell, I looked out and I saw him lying down on the sidewalk all crumpled up. It made me sick. People were running toward where he lay. Hunter went to the window too, and looked out. Buttsky stayed on the couch; she seemed afraid to look.

I didn't say a word. I managed to stagger to the door. I was horrified, dazed. Before I could get out, though, Hunter caught hold of me. He said:

"My God, Harry, wait a minute! They may accuse us of throwing him out."

I tried to get away from him, and I said: "I've got to get down there. He may be alive. We must get a doctor at once. They'll want to know how it happened." I tried to jerk away, but Hunter held me.

"You bet they'll want to know," Hunter said. "The police will ask all sorts of questions, and we've got to explain it somehow. We can't possibly tell them what really happened, though. They'd never believe it. We'll have to agree on a story right now quick, and all of us stick to it."

Buttsky had begun to cry. I broke away from Hunter then—I simply couldn't talk about it; and I ran out to the elevator in the hall. I rang and rang, but it didn't come up, so I ran down the seven flights of stairs and out into the street. It was horrible. Carlo was dead, all right; I could see that. He lay in a big pool of blood, and his face was all smashed in on one side.

There were a few people standing around, and a lot more were running up to get a look. The elevator-boy was there, and when he saw me, he pointed me out to a cop who had run up, and told him that I had been up in Carlo Blune's apartment.

"He was there with some other people," the boy said. "They're up there now, I guess, but I don't know who they are. Mr. Maddox, here, he's been up there often to see Mr. Blune."

The cop grabbed me by the elbow and asked what had happened.

I didn't know what to say at first. I knew Hunter was right, and nobody would ever believe the truth of it; but I had no idea what he and Buttsky were going to say. So I just said it was an accident. I said Mr. Blune had been looking out the window, and was a little drunk, and had somehow lost his balance and fallen out.

Just then a couple of squad-cars came up with bells clanging, and a lot more cops jumped out. They began shoving the crowd back, and some one threw an overcoat over Carlo's body. An ambulance came rushing up, and then I was taken to a police station and was questioned by the sergeant and some others until the Homicide Squad arrived, and they took me upstairs. I had a pretty hard time. I told the same story I had told before, that it was an accident. It seemed to be the only thing I could think of it, to explain the tragedy. It *was* an accident, anyway.

Then they brought in Hunter and Buttsky, crying, but I didn't know what they said until the trial, because we were kept separated. But they had had just time, you see, before the police came up to Carlo's studio, to cook up a story. They said that Carlo and I had quarreled about a girl I had brought there, and after she had left, I called Carlo down for the way he had treated her, and then I hit Carlo and we had a fight near the open window, and I had pushed Carlo out.

So I was indicted for the murder and the case went on trial. I had no money and an attorney was assigned to defend me. But he was so stupid and so damned conceited that I might just as well have had nobody at all. I tried to tell him the truth, but he simply laughed at me. He said I was plain nuts, but if I wanted to set up a defense of insanity, all right, I could tell my fairy-tale to the jury. But if I didn't, he wouldn't permit me to take the stand. When I protested that I was perfectly sane, he said:

"Well, at that, I'd rather go to an asylum than to the chair."

I told him that I'd rather take a chance of being free in the next world than be caged up with a lot of lunatics and probably end by going crazy myself.

Then he told me that if I'd confess to having thrown Carlo out the window, but without premeditation, he might get a second-degree murder verdict. But I absolutely refused to lie about it, even to save my life.

"O. K.," he said; "it's your funeral. If my client won't help me, I can't do anything with the case and I guess you'll have to burn." He had no feeling at all, and he wouldn't even listen to my explanation.

What could I do? If I had told my story on the witness-stand just as it had really happened, everyone would think I had concocted a fantastic yarn to get an acquittal. Hunter and Buttsky didn't dare to tell the truth, either, because they both knew that it would place them also under suspicion, and by accusing me, they played safe. They were two to one against me. They preferred having me go to the chair to going themselves. And so as I had virtually no defense, I was convicted.

BUT I am going to tell now, before I die, what happened in Carlo Blune's studio in Greenwich Village that night. I came to the United States as an actor and spent some time in Hollywood. But I have been in New York only a few months, and my relatives, what are left of them, are way off in Manitoba, and so I have no intimate friends here to whom I have cared or dared to tell my story. But perhaps there is someone somewhere who has had a similar experience who may believe me.

The whole thing began when, one night, I dropped in at some kind of big public séance. In the Chapter Room of Carnegie Hall, it was. I don't go much for spiritism myself, but I rather enjoy the show and looking around at the queer, credulous types

you see there, and listening to their dramatic stories.

I had been watching a red-headed chap beside me because he seemed so intently interested. He had a thin, what I call a "thinking" face, with thin, sharp features. He had a sport shirt on with the collar over his coat, no tie, and I put him down as a typical Greenwich Village intellectual type. While the blindfolded medium up on the platform was reading and answering messages sent up to him from the audience, I whispered to this chap, just to see what he'd say.

"There ought to be a College for Spooks," I said. "They've been sending the same old optimistic hokum—'I'm very happy here,' and 'It'll come out all right,'—ever since the Fox Sisters rapped out their first message."

He nodded, but looked serious. "I can't understand, though," he said, "how that medium up there can read those messages, with his eyes all taped up and bandaged like that. Looks to me like genuine clairvoyance."

We got to talking, and after the show we went out together, still talking. In the Russian tearoom near by, over our beer and sandwiches, I found that he believed—and I did, too, in a way—that although there was undoubtedly a lot of faking in these demonstrations, there still may be psychic powers that we haven't as yet developed on the mortal plane—telepathy, automatic writing, clairaudience, and that sort of thing.

Well, that was the way I first met Carlo Blune. I can't say I ever really cared very much for him personally, but he had a sort of magnetism and enthusiasm that was rather interesting. He was a painter—one of these ultra-modernists who paint freak pictures with parts of female bodies and great big eyes with no bodies, and violins and all sorts of incongruous things, letters and numbers all mixed up and daubs of raw color. We're used to that stuff now and consider the artists merely cranks; but Carlo was in such dead earnest about his "arrangements" as he called them, that we had some hot discussions sometimes about art and his particular brand of "Subjective Impressionism." But we were always friendly enough, and we never came anywhere near any such quarrel as Hunter and Buttsky told about at the trial.

This studio of Carlo's, where the tragedy happened, was a big front room on the seventh floor of one of those old brownstone front apartment-houses in Washington Place. It had a dark inside bedroom and a bathroom, and kitchenette between that and the studio. I was a bit amazed when I first saw the place. He must sell his pictures pretty well, I thought, (and he did), to fit up the studio with those big Oriental rugs and couches and those shelves and shelves of books; and those primitive ebony African idols I happen to know, cost real money, nowadays. His weird pictures were all over the walls. But in the candlelight—Carlo loved candlesticks and he had dozens and dozens of old brass ones—it was a very pleasant place

The cop asked what had happened.
I just said it was an accident.

to loaf and talk, especially as Carlo would sometimes sit down at his baby grand and fool around over the keys, and often end up with music that would surprise and charm you.

Well, after we'd had a highball or two up there one night, and Carlo had played a Chopin prelude, he came over and took a palette off a Turkish tabouret and sat down near me. He was silent for a while. Then suddenly he ran his hand back through his thick reddish hair and asked me if I had ever dreamed of floating in the air.

I laughed, it came so unexpectedly; but he didn't wait for me to answer. He said: "I do, all the time." Then, after a moment, he repeated it abstractedly; "All the time!" He sat hunched over watching the blue smoke curl up from his pipe. "Some say it's a prehistoric memory of when we were apes and jumped from tree to tree," he said. "But there's a lot more to it than that."

I still didn't say anything. I just watched him. Picturesque chap, I thought, picturesque mind.

HIS head was in his hands and his elbows on his knees, pondering. "It's a marvelous sensation," he said, thoughtfully, "perfectly marvelous. It makes you feel almost divine." His voice had a far-away sound, as if he were talking in his sleep. "I float along through the streets," he said, dreamily, "over the houses—over the hills and rivers—floating anywhere I want to go, simply by directing my will."

I tried to get in something about Freud's theory of dreams, but he shook his head. "No, he's as far off as the twenty-five-cent dreambooks the servant girls and gamblers consult," Carlo said. "This floating dream is too rational, Harry, it's too realistic to be merely symbolic. Then he turned and looked at me almost fiercely. "Why, damn it," he said, "to me, these flying dreams are just exactly as real as anything in my waking life."

I don't ordinarily care much about hearing other people's dreams, but, after all, I was drinking Carlo's whisky, and I liked the intense way he felt about everything. He went into things all over, or not at all.

"This thing of floating," he went on, "seems to have a special technique. Facility, I mean, comes progressively. You learn it a step at a time."

And then he told me he had begun by taking enormous jumps—"Oh, perhaps a hundred feet," he said, and when landing, springing off again exactly on the rebound, like a bouncing ball. It was a question of timing your mental impulse, he said, and he had gradually got the hang of it as you do swimming. And then, he told me, he had become able to take off, so to speak, even while lying flat on his back. It took a tremendous mental effort, though, he said.

"It's done by concentration and will power," Carlo told me seriously. "If you try hard enough, you can rise slowly in the air."

I took care not to smile. "In your dreams, you mean?" I said.

"Yes," Carlo said wistfully, "in my dreams. But the sensation is so vivid, so powerful, that after I've waked up, I've actually tried to do it." Then he added so timidly that you could fancy his blushing almost, "In point of fact I try it in bed every morning when I wake up. It seems impossible that I shouldn't be able to do it the way I do in my dreams. I know exactly just how it's done."

He had got up, and stood rigid with his face set and his fists clenched; and I think he would have tried it for me right then and there if the doorbell hadn't rung just then. We were both annoyed at the interruption. It was like being waked too early in the morning.

It was a reporter named Hunter who had called with his girl, a little black-haired thing he called Buttsky. Carlo told me afterward that she was always with Hunter. After the two had ensconced themselves on the big couch, I could see how Carlo might like that big, slouchy, curly-haired blond chap with his happy-dog face and bad teeth. He was so easy and so facile (too facile, I thought), that he fitted right into any group or discussion. But I couldn't quite understand Carlo's special attention to the girl. She seemed insignificant to me, though she was cute enough in a common sort of way, too, a rather pretty, quiet little number who apparently saw everything and said almost nothing. I was a bit afraid of her, to tell the truth; I don't trust anyone who smiles all the time. Carlo, though, welcomed her as if she were really important; and I wondered at the time whether he mightn't perhaps be chasing her behind Hunter's back, and also, too, whether she wasn't the sort that would lead him on, and then laugh at him.

"LEVITATION, the raising of a body in the air without mechanical means. . . . Of Daniel Home (1833-1886) Mr. (later Sir William) Crookes, F.R.S., writes in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* (Jan., 1874), of which he was editor: 'On three separate occasions have I seen him raised completely from the floor of the room . . . There are at least a hundred recorded instances of Home's rising from the ground, in the presence of as many separate persons, and I have heard from the lips of the three witnesses to the most striking occurrence of this kind (the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Lindsay and Captain C. Wynne) their own most minute accounts of what took place.'

"To this day, if psychical researchers are disposed to make any exceptions whatever to the axiom that every physical medium is fraudulent, the one to whom they give the greatest benefit of the doubt is the enigmatic Mr. Home," writes Jean Burton in "The Heyday of a Wizard." (Alfred Knopf) . . . "The Dictionary of National Biography cites Home's history as 'a curious and as yet unsolved problem.' . . . Home gave no clues during his lifetime, and he took his secret with him. No one could say whether or to what extent he believed in his own legend. All that was certain was that he had given a brilliant and marvelously sustained performance; and sometimes great actors who play one rôle for many seasons almost forget where the rôle ends and their own personality begins."

Encyclopedia Britannica

CARLO gave them drinks and pushed a red lacquer bowl toward Buttsky, and she began chain-smoking cigarettes, one after another. That was why they called her Buttsky, I discovered. She'd smoke them down till they were so small that anyone else would have thrown them away; but she'd stick a pin into them to hold them by; it was horrid.

Well, we talked a little about Carlo's new picture, "Oblique Transaction," he called it, and about poetry, this Dada stuff, you know; and then Carlo played the piano a bit while Hunter dozed on the couch, and Buttsky smoked and smiled, and watched me with her little black eyes.

Then Carlo came over and began to tell us all about levitation. Hunter went sound asleep and snored; but Buttsky listened eagerly. I don't remember half what Carlo said that night, but he had evidently been reading up on the subject, and he gave us the Sanskrit word for it, *"laghiman"* or something like that—I remember it sounded like an Irish name—and he cited historic cases of ecstasy when some old chaps had been lifted up into the air while praying. *"Libration,"* he called it, when they hung there suspended, still praying. I had no idea the thing was so well known; but it seems that in the Middle Ages everybody believed it was a common supernatural power with the devoted, and Carlo mentioned even Cardinal Newman as a believer of it in his *"Apologia."*

Hunter woke up then and entered right into it as if he'd heard the whole thing. "Why, see here, Carlo," he yawned, "wasn't there a medium in England along back in the 1860's—Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a follower of his, I believe. What was his name, now—Home, that's it. At his séances he used to float right out the window and then float back again."

Carlo said impatiently: "Why, that's just what I was talking about. Sir William Crookes was present at several of Home's séances and testified to the truth of the phenomena."

"Yeah," Hunter drawled, "but I believe Home was exposed, later."

"That doesn't matter," said Carlo. "I know that crooked mediums have done levitation by trickery. Magicians do it all the time, and John Mulholland explains it all in his book. But that doesn't prove that it isn't perhaps possible to overcome the force of gravity genuinely by a sheer effort of the will, or by some unknown power. Christ walked on the water, didn't He? And the apostle Peter did too, and he sank only because he hadn't enough faith. You've got to believe in it, or you never can do it."

I ventured to say that miracles didn't take place nowadays.

"Miracles," said Carlo, "are merely the phenomena of scientific laws we don't yet understand." And of course he went on with the analogy of the telephone and radio and cosmic waves, and all that, the way they always do.

Buttsky, still smiling, still smoking cigarettes, said that modern mediums sometimes overcame the laws of gravity when they tipped tables; and Hunter grinned like a dog, and said that if you could acquire the art of levitation, you could put the helicopter out of business.

Carlo didn't answer, and was moody for a while, rolling one of his brushes in his fingers; and his face was so serious that Hunter stopped with his glass halfway up to his lips and looked at him curiously.

"D'you mean to say, Carlo, that you—" And then he stopped.

Carlo said: "The swami Vivekananda says in his *'Raja Yoga'* that it's possible even nowadays."

"Yeah," Hunter said, "but all those miraculous things the yogas do in India, you know, are supposed to be the result of severe ascetic training. You can't drink and smoke and eat beefsteaks and pork chops, Carlo, and expect to develop transcendental powers."

And Buttsky chimed in that she'd never seen a mystic with short hair and a close shave, or one who wore smartly tailored clothes.

Carlo said absent-mindedly that no doubt they were right, and after a while he wandered over to the piano and ran his fingers over the keys improvising softly. He didn't seem to want to discuss the subject further.

And I myself forgot all about the matter when I left New York and went up in Maine to join a summer stock company for two months. To tell the truth, I was rather specializing on a girl in the show. When I got back to the city and went to see Carlo, I hardly recognized him. He looked pale and gaunt, and he had a short, ragged red beard with his hair straggling down, curling over his coat collar. He had nothing on but a pair of old slacks and an undershirt and sandals, and he looked as if he needed a bath.

Illustrated by Manning de V. Lee

"It's coming, Harry," he said. "I can feel the power growing in me."

"I'm afraid I can't offer you a drink, Harry," he said. " I find the smell of alcohol affects me disagreeably, nowadays. And too, if you don't mind, I wish you wouldn't smoke. All my senses seem to have grown more acute lately. I can hear what people are saying down in the street, and I can read when it's almost pitch dark." As I was putting out my cigar, he came over and put his hand on my shoulder. "It's coming, Harry," he said earnestly. "I can feel the power growing in me every day."

I DIDN'T think he looked as though he had much power, and I said so.

He sat down on the couch and gazed up at the ceiling. "It's a spiritual power," he said, "or perhaps psychic. I don't know what it is, but it's supernormal. It operates in the unknown—I mean, it isn't subject to physical laws as we know them. It's a new kind of force." Then he looked at me pathetically. "And it does rather take it out of you," he said.

I found that all he was having to eat was a glass of water, with a little salt in it (for the blood-stream) for breakfast, an apple at noon, and some thin lentil soup for dinner.

"You see, this regimen," Carlo explained, "is not so much to 'mortify the body' for religious reasons, as the old hermits thought, as to refine your forces and sort of get rid of the sediment of the physical and sensual life all you can. I intend to give this thing a rigorous trial, Harry," he said, "and do all I can to ensure the optimum conditions."

I couldn't help asking him if he contemplated his navel, like the Eastern mystics.

"I'm simply letting this power guide me intuitively," he said, and he said he'd found that music helped a lot in inducing a mood of abstraction. He said he could sit for two hours now without moving a muscle.

To tell the truth, I was rather worried. I hated to see Carlo go completely haywire; but it was no business of mine, and I couldn't have stopped his experiment anyway. I didn't see him again for a fortnight, and by that time his fasting had made him still thinner. His flesh was falling in against his skull, and his face looked almost translucent, with his dark blue

eyes shining in their sockets like a cat's. When he walked, he moved slowly as if he were carrying something that might spill, sliding his feet along so there was no spring; and he spoke in an unaccented, unmodulated, forceless voice so low you could hardly hear him. It was important, he told me, to avoid the slightest emotion and preserve a perfect serenity in order to deepen his concentration.

"I've lost about eighteen pounds," he said, and then, with that faint smile of his, he added: "But that makes it a little easier. There isn't so much of me to lift." He said it in a queer way.

"D'you mean to say, Carlo, that you've had any success already? That you've actually lifted yourself?"

HE told me, in that low, impassive voice, as you might talk of the weather, that he had, that very morning, risen a few inches from his bed.

"But the telephone bell rang just then," he said, "wrong number, of course, and it seemed to break my concentration; I suppose I felt irritated, and I dropped down onto the bed." Then he had that queer smile again. "Or else the bell woke me up. You know, it's getting hard to distinguish between my real life and my dreams, now, they're so vivid. You see, after you've got to a certain point in fasting and introspection, there isn't much difference between the inner and the outer activities. And that's why I'm going to ask a favor of you, Harry," he said. "I want you to watch me, and see just what happens. I need a witness in order to know how far I am along."

And that brings me to the part of my story that I hardly expect many people to credit. Up to here, you may think merely that Carlo was a little cracked. But after this, you may think that I am too. Well, anyway, Carlo asked me to concentrate with him and not speak.

And the solemn fact is that, when we had brought his cot into the studio, and after we had both concentrated in silence for some time—ten minutes, perhaps, though it seemed like an hour—I could hardly believe my eyes. Believe it or not, I did indubitably see Carlo Blune rise up in the air. There was no doubt about it whatever. He rose about a foot or so, still stretched out horizontally. He stayed there suspended in the air a while—it was what he called "libration"—and then he spoke in a low voice without moving his lips.

"I'm afraid I'm getting weaker again," he said; "I'm coming down. Relax a little, Harry." And then he sank slowly down on the cot.

Neither could speak for a while. We looked at each other as if each were questioning the other to know if it were really true. You might think Carlo, after a demonstration like that, would be elated by his success; but no, he looked kind of awed, almost frightened. I sat and watched him breathing heavily, as if he were exhausted. Finally he sat up with a strange expression, and his voice trembled.

"You helped a lot, Harry," he said. "I could feel your added power lifting me."

We talked there in his studio for an hour about it, but we didn't try the experiment again. He didn't propose it, and said his head ached, and I saw that it had taken a lot out of him. But before I left, he said:

"Harry, d'you know, with more help— I mean more concentration and more will power or whatever it is, I believe I could float about the room, like Home."

I advised him not to try it again; but he insisted that he was going to get Hunter and Buttsky to work with us. A psychic battery, he called it.

I wondered, I said, if it were best to have a woman present.

"You mean on account of the sex angle?" he asked. "Well, mediums always say that the male and female make a better magnetic current. Ordinarily the presence of a woman might distract perfect concentration. But Buttsky, you know, is psychic. Definitely. She can read your thoughts. I've seen her do extraordinary things."

I said I knew there was something queer about her, and that in the Seventeenth Century, she would probably have been burned as a witch.

"I know what you mean," Carlo said: "her eyes! She has what the gypsies call 'the light behind the eyes.' But she's very much interested in this thing, and reinforces my faith."

I said O.K., and if he felt that way about it, there was a girl I'd like to bring; and I told him about Lydia Gay, who had played *ingénue* parts in the stock company with me that summer. She was a cute blonde twenty-year-old, and she'd been through the theatrical mill and knew her way round. A little plain-spoken at times, perhaps, but I thought she'd fit in. That was as much as I knew about women. If you've been with them awhile alone, you think you know all about them. But when two of them get together, that's another thing again.

I made my fatal mistake, though, when I didn't tell Lydia just what the party was going to be like. If I had, then she could have testified at the trial that I had told her we were going to experiment with levitation. Then I could have come out with my story. But all she said was that I had just asked her to come along to Carlo's, and hadn't even told her that there'd be no drinks.

When we got up to Carlo's studio that evening, we found him in a pale blue sport shirt and pale blue slacks and bare feet. He said afterward that pale blue was the lightest color of all, lighter even than white, and it might improve the conditions. As usual he had loads of candles burning, a big bunch of them, all in old brass candlesticks, on a table and a dozen or so more on the mantel.

Carlo couldn't bear to have candles stuck around singly, the way people do, to give that vague, diffused light some women love. Carlo loved sharp shadows.

BUTTSKY and Hunter were already there, lolling on the couch. After Lydia had shaken hands with Carlo and said how-de-do to the others, she looked round at the pictures. Then she stopped and said: "My God!" Then she walked round looking at one after another. Then she burst out laughing.

He moved more quickly than before, and before I could stop him, he was halfway out.

"Well, Mr. Blune," she said, 'I wouldn't want you to paint *my* portrait. I wouldn't have but one eye, and probably no legs. You wouldn't miss my bust, though, I expect, from what I see here."

How I could ever have expected her to fit in is a mystery. Carlo was taken aback. It did sound rather gross, considering what we had come for. Hunter laughed; Buttsky said dryly:

"I'm afraid you don't know much about modern art, Miss Gay."

Lydia whirled round at her. They clashed at once. "Modern art?" she repeated. "Well, I guess I ought to know something about it. My God, I played *Ophelia* in Hamlet in modern costume and no scenery—in fact, in this very gown."

Buttsky smiled and stuck a pin in the butt of her cigarette. "Do you really call that dress modern?" she said.

"It's as modern as that bang you're wearing on your forehead," said Lydia, and you could hear her very distinctly, too. "Fact is, when I came in here, honest I thought you was some eight-year-old kid with that bang. Pretty good guess, at that—only forty or so years off."

THERE was more of this feline amenity, and Carlo led me aside and said he was afraid Miss Gay had brought in antagonistic vibrations and we'd better call the whole thing off. Lydia Gay had sharp ears as well as a sharp tongue, and she shrugged her shoulders and said in a very stagy voice that she was afraid I'd given her a bum steer, and she had just happened to remember that she had promised to call on a dying aunt tonight, and she walked out with her chin in the air.

There was a moment's shocked silence, then I went out after her and said I'd go along with her and take her home or wherever she wanted to go. But she just looked at me and said she didn't know me, and I'd better go back and play with the cat in there, and more of the same, till the elevator took her downstairs.

You can imagine how ruffled we all were, but there was absolutely no comment at all. They didn't say one word about Lydia. We all tried to ignore the episode and pretend nothing had happened. All except Carlo, of course. He was pretty weak with all his fasting, and he was almost overcome by the scene. But Buttsky finally succeeded in wheedling him into a reluctant consent to go on with the séance.

She and Hunter, however, testified at the trial that after Lydia left, Carlo and I immediately began to quarrel. I accused him and Buttsky both of insulting my guest, she said, and that Hunter tried to intervene between Carlo and me. They said that Carlo and I had it back and forth for almost an hour, with mutual recriminations, and finally it developed into an actual fight near the window. The

idea of Carlo Blune, who was always peaceful, and was weakened by his fasting—he weighed only 118 when he died—getting into a vulgar brawl like that is absurd. Why, Buttsky even testified that he had called Lydia a vile name.

Well, after Lydia left, it took a long time before we were calmed down to normal. Carlo sat at the piano and played and played. At last he got up and put his finger to his lips for silence. Then I helped him bring in the cot, and he threw a blue Navajo blanket over it. Then Carlo put out all the candles but two, and lay down on his back on the cot.

SO there you have the set-up for that hot August night in Carlo Blune's studio, the day he died: Hunter and Buttsky on the big couch, and I sitting in an armchair by one of the open casement windows, the kind that open outward.

Hunter, as a reporter had undoubtedly seen enough strange sights to be able to take it all lightly enough, but Buttsky was so excited, that she apparently didn't realize that she wasn't smoking. She watched Carlo, fascinated. He lay there thin and pale, motionless, with his eyes closed and his hands folded over his breast, looking for all the world like a corpse. It was uncanny.

I confess I could feel my heart beat. I was troubled. I had seen him actually accomplish the thing, you know, and I didn't like the idea very much, and I wished I hadn't consented to come. Perhaps it was a presentiment; perhaps I felt that we were playing with a dangerous, unknown power, and we might not be able to handle it.

It must have been at least half an hour before Carlo moved. Then Buttsky gave a little suppressed gasp, and Hunter leaned forward, staring. None of us spoke. We saw Carlo rise slowly in the air, off the cot, a few inches. He hung there a moment, then he went up a foot or more rather quickly. Then, while we held our breaths, he floated slowly out into the room. We heard him say, in a low, strange voice:

"Concentrate! *Concentrate!*"

We concentrated, all right. I felt, and Hunter and Buttsky probably did too, that we were just as if holding him up in the air by our combined will power, like holding up a heavy weight, and we were responsible for his safety. We watched him circle round the room, and round again. He was floating about five feet above the floor.

All this time Carlo's eyes had been closed. When he did open them he had a strange, inspired look. He didn't look at us, he looked sort of sidewise, upward, in an ecstasy. Then he stopped moving and hung there while he spoke.

"I've got it!" he said. "It has been revealed, the whole secret of it. I'm sure of it now. It's just as it was in my dreams, there's no difference at all, when you feel the power. . . Faith—will—serenity. You must have all three. I know now that I can float out the window into the street."

We were speechless with fear. I was, anyway. But I couldn't move.

"I'm going to do it," Carlo said. "I know I can do it. I am going out, and I am coming back. It has been done, and I can do it."

Slowly his body moved toward the window. The window, you know, was open. But he moved more quickly than he had before, and before I could do anything to stop him, he was halfway out.

Then I shouted: "Carlo! Don't, Carlo! Don't! For God's sake!" And I grabbed his legs at the knee.

Hunter had jumped up, and Buttsky was screaming. Carlo gave an agonized groan, and suddenly his body became heavy in my grasp. It fell, and I couldn't hold him—he slipped through my hands. And then, that sickening thump on the sidewalk, seven stories below. . . .

And that is the truth about the death of Carlo Blune. His concentration, and ours, was broken by what I did, in my fear and horror, and he couldn't then be supported by whatever power had held him up. It was my fault. But I tried only to save him. . . .

I am innocent of the murder of Carlo Blune, but I don't wish to escape the death-penalty. I welcome it. And this is why. Since I have been in jail here, I have eaten very little. I have had no exercise, no diversions whatever. I have had a chance to do a lot of thinking and introspection. And I have, for six weeks, been practicing levitation as Carlo practiced it, concentrating upon a power that I know, now, exists. Twice, while the prison attendants were out of sight, I have succeeded in rising a few inches when lying on my back on the cell bed. Once, indeed, I rose at least two feet.

Having accomplished this, I want to know more. I want to live the larger, freer life on another plane, where not only levitation and telepathy and clairvoyance, but other greater, finer powers are developed and enjoyed. And so I shall walk my last mile, and go through the little green door, with joy and expectation in my heart. I don't know where that next world is, nor what form of existence I shall have after I die. But I can hardly wait to find out.

I expect to learn much tomorrow.

THINGS

A CHANGE:

So many stories were offered for this department that were well worth printing, but did not fall into its original plan, that we have decided to enlarge its scope and change its title to something like "My Most Amusing Experience." In other words: What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you? Tell us about it.

Peril in Panama

AS some of the Medical Department employees sat on the upper verandas of the Bachelor Medical Quarters at Ancon (now Gorgas) Hospital, they noticed one night down in the city of Panama, which was spread out at the foot of the hill, a light blinking down in the older part of the city, overlooking the bay. The light seemed to follow some sort of regular pattern of intermittent long and short flashes, with irregular intervals in between.

This was in the early summer of 1916, when it was becoming increasingly evident that the United States would eventually be forced into the war then raging in Europe. In Panama, the German Consulate General had become an active center of German propaganda, and little effort was made to conceal the military intelligence activities going on.

Rumors were prevalent of German submarines lying in wait off the Canal to sink Allied ships; and it looked very possible that these lights might be signals to a German sub coming into the outer bay under cover of darkness.

One of the engineers made a "fix" with his transit on the lights at night, and in the morning was able to locate the source in the top floor of an old four-story building, the upper floors of which were used as apartments.

The next night one of the telegraph operators from the railroad watched the lights, but the dots and dashes did not make sense in Morse or International, or in any known code. Then a captain of the Zone Police was asked to come over to the quarters, with our promise to show him something that might interest him. It did. He promptly arranged with the Panama city police, and the next evening they

made a call on the apartment whence came the lights; and they found—

A quiet, peaceful old gentleman, a minor official in the city government, had an apartment there. He had a reading light on a small table by the window, where he used to sit and read his evening paper, rocking back and forth in his old Boston rocker, a family heirloom. His movements back and forth with the paper in his hands, between the light and the window, resulted in the intermittent dots and dashes that had been watched with mounting suspicion and alarm from up on Ancon Hill, some two or three miles away.

Milo C. Pratt,
Lt. Col. U. S. A. Ret.

Network Nutwork

THEY'RE still talking about it in the Chicago offices of that broadcasting company—but in whispers. And they still turn a trifle pink around the ears when they're reminded of it.

The Thing That Was Not What It Seemed: One afternoon last winter forty highly trained and highly paid musicians sat in a studio of this big network's Chicago outlet, with fingers poised on their instruments. The conductor, baton held high, tensely awaited the signal from the control-room. The long red sweep-second hand of the studio clock approached its zenith. The control man nodded. *"Now!"* The studio signal light blazed its ruby warning: *"On the Air!"* The production director's finger jabbed: the orchestra's leader's baton fell; and music welled forth from one tiny room in Chicago to gladden the hearts of music-lovers the nation over.

Or so, at least, everyone thought—until several weeks later routine replies began dribbling back to Chicago in answer to the network's routine query as to programs used by individual stations. Then the dreadful truth made itself clear. The local Chicago station had not carried the program. No Midwestern station had carried it. No Eastern affiliate had carried it—no Northern—no Southern—and no Western station had carried the program!

In fact, for thirty solid minutes of valuable air-time, forty highly trained and highly paid musicians had sat in a radio studio, literally "blowing their brains out" into wind-instruments, racing their fingers up and down the frets of strings, belaboring percussions—and not a soul in the United States had enjoyed the fruits of their labors but two lonely men sitting in the control-room!

The Explanation: All networks carry, as a service, regular "sustaining" (*i.e.*, non-commercial) programs which may, or may not be picked up by affiliated stations at their discretion. Since these individual stations may, and do, obtain periods of local commercial sponsorship, they are at liberty to accept or reject the sustaining features "fed" to them over the specially leased telephone wires of the nation.

The *contretemps* just described was an example of something that *can* conceivably happen—but might not happen again in a score of years.

Simultaneously, every station on the network had substituted for the sustaining program a preferred program of local origination.

And so, while forty highly trained and highly paid musicians— Ah, well! "Just one of those things," of course. But don't mention it in the Chicago offices. Not right away, anyway.

Nelson S. Bond.

Steamboat in the Desert

SOME years back, crossing Nevada's desert, our car topped the hill above the great mirage. There it was, covering the valley below, a beautiful lake shimmering in the afternoon sun. We always stopped when we gained the crest to admire its splendid likeness. We missed its grandeur when overcast skies prevented the reflection. We marveled at its mystifying magnificence; but this time our surprise was complete. We saw a steamboat churning its way across the bright blue water!

We knew that this was an impossibility. Yet there it was, with its coil of black smoke trailing away behind.

We sat there, amazed at its progress, trying to figure it out. Then we quickly headed the car down into the mirage, straight for the oncoming steamer. We neared the flat bottom of the valley, and the lake drew in its shorelines to become smaller and smaller until there was only a little pond; and in the middle of the pond the steamboat plowed serenely on toward us.

We pulled aside and stopped. The mirage was gone. There in front of us was a train of ore wagons from the mine, pulled along by a huge steam tractor.

The fireman straightened up to wave us a greeting, then cramming another chunk of coal into the boiler that sent black smoke whirling around us, he clattered by without ever knowing of the mystery we had solved.

Rector Lee.

ANECDOTES offered for publication in this department should not be longer than five hundred words and may be much shorter. For all anecdotes published by us we will pay from five to twenty-five dollars, according to our appraisal of their quality both in presentation and in story. Please address them to the My Most Amusing Experience Editor, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. We cannot acknowledge or return unpublished contributions, but all will be carefully considered. All published material becomes the property of McCall Corporation.

The Rangers Came

MANY years ago three barefoot boys on their way to "meet the train," made a circuitous detour around a heel-burr patch that lay like a mine-field between our homes and the depot.

We had the thrill of a lifetime as two huge men alighted from the train. There was nothing unusual in the way they were dressed—just range garb topped off with big hats; but each carried a Winchester, and through the gap made by unbuttoned coats shone a brassy gleam as the sun reflected on cartridge belts.

"Rangers!" said one of the men standing near by.

"I wonder who they're after?"

"Don't know," someone answered. "Not a thing has happened that I know of, except those ballplayers getting rotten-egged last week by some kids." He glanced in our direction.

Now there *had been* some ballplayers who had left town the week before amid a barrage of ripe eggs—and now three lads took off for home.

The Rangers no doubt, though ignorant of the cause, had seen lots of fast get-aways; but I'll bet they had never seen anything to equal the one the three barefoot boys made as they tore through that burr-patch on flying feet. One Ranger was usually sent, but when there were two on the job, we *knew* they meant business!

ANSWER: No, they were not after the "eggers," but had merely alighted from the train to get horses to continue the chase of a wanted man who had fled into the badlands beyond our town.

John Fowler.

See You in the

Lest they be left behind when the regiment goes overseas, our Three Soldiers start war at home.

by PHIL MAGEE

WEDGED in between Tony's broad bulk, and Big John's six-foot-four-inch figure, the little man sat on the barracks bags piled near the open door of the Noncoms' Room. Shaking his head, he watched the other company noncoms struggle for position before the two wall mirrors.

"Act like they never expect to see a town again," Tony scoffed.

"Some of them won't," the little man said softly. "Look at Streamline."

Holding his overgenerous nasal appendage with one hand, Streamline Swartz operated a razor with dangerous rapidity.

"Yah," Big John fumed, "and he has the crust to offer to get me a date, Sully. Me!"

Tony shrugged. "Next to Sully, Streamline is the smartest platoon leader in this outfit," he said.

"So what?" Big John demanded. "Is he better-looking than me?"

"Who aint?" Tony inquired politely.

"Skip it," the little man snapped, glancing at his watch. "Six hours, and they're counting it as so many minutes of romance!"

"I am practically falling down with romance," Big John snorted. "But when a guy's pulling out in the morning, for Italy, or maybe Australia, he'd oughta spend his last night—"

"Winding up unfinished business," the little man concluded, thankful that his companions were men of purpose—serious men, who'd spend their few remaining leisure hours in worthwhile accomplishment.

"And when we're laying in some Dago foxhole, or pounding around the boondocks out in the Pacific, we'll have things to remember," Tony said. "And they won't be about no kiss in the moonlight, either."

The little man got to his feet. "A man should cling to the solid things," he agreed. "Let's go. The Top said the battalion commander wanted to see us before we hit for town."

"What's he want?" Tony grumbled.

"Probably depending on us to see that the guys get back by midnight," Big John suggested. "One thing about the Old Man: he sure knows who the solid citizens are."

"Where we going first, Sully?" Tony asked.

"Deuce Daniels'," the little man said, moving toward the door. "There isn't a dogface in this outfit who hasn't been fumbled out of a payday in that filthy card-trap."

"Do we bust him wide open, Sully?" Big John questioned eagerly.

Glancing at the cloudless sky, the little man decided that they'd miss Southern California. After all, what other place had offered such really challenging problems? He shook his head. "No," he said, "tinhorn gamblers expect that sort of thing. I'd like to leave on a more subtle touch."

"Something light, huh, Sully?"

Sully nodded. "If you draw to a four-heart flush, and Deuce is dealing, what do you get?" he asked.

"The deuce of spades," Tony growled.

"Mr. Daniels is overly fond of that card," Sully said. "Tonight we'll determine just how fond."

"You mean?"

"Exactly. While John holds him, I will feed it to him. In properly digestible portions, of course," Sully explained.

"And who takes care of his strong-arms?"

"Tony."

"Aw, Sully," Big John complained, "I never have any fun."

The little man shrugged. "It's a small room," he said, "and Tony punches shorter than you do. But at Nick's, things'll be different," he promised.

Big John brightened visibly.

SWINGING up the company street, they headed for battalion headquarters. But a booming voice brought them to a stop: "Hey, Sully!"

Turning, the little man saw Streamline Swartz standing in the door of the Noncoms' Room, his corporals clustered around him.

"Whyn't you guys go in with us?" Streamline called. "We're gonna pitch a whingding that'll hold these native sons till we get back."

Tony sniffed. Big John stiffened. Truly a delicate situation. The democracy of our armed forces is unquestioned; but there is caste in any trade.

Professionally, Sergeant Swartz was above reproach. Nearly as large as Tony, he tilted the scales at two hundred and twenty-five. A very fair right-handed puncher, his big nose could always be found, hilt deep, in any argument. But once, in Baltimore, Streamline Swartz had taken lip from a cop. And one cannot hold faith in those with no stability.

The little man shook his head. "Sorry, Streamline," he said, "but we have a date with Bumboat Benny."

"That's what the Old Man probably wants to talk to us about," Big John said, as they moved on. "Guys like him—guys that aint dependable. Taking lip from a Cossack!"

"The irresponsible type," Sully said, while Tony refused to discuss such a flighty character. "How about when

Morning!

"Act like they never expect to see a town again," Tony scoffed. "Some of them won't," the little man said softly.

we kiss Deuce good-by, Sully?" he asked. "You said something about Nick's."

"I did, indeed," the little man admitted.

"Nick's Napoli," Big John cut in. "My stomach does a nip-up every time I think of that joint."

"I'd sure like to see that greaseball drink some of his own ulcer fluid," Tony growled.

"We will bid Nick a pleasant good evening," Sully said. "We will invite him to sit with us. We will order whisky sours. It should be very interesting."

"Suppose he refuses to drink 'em?"

The little man raised his brows. "Refuses?" he asked. "With Tony twisting his arm?"

"You think of everything," Big John enthused.

The little man made modest disclaimer. "Acute gastric acidity is really all we can hope for," he said.

"Nick only keeps two or three floormen," Tony said. "How we gonna kill the rest of the evening?"

"Have you forgotten Bumboat Benny?"

"Bumboat Benny!" Tony blazed. "The Longshoreman's Retreat, huh?"

"Yah," Big John stormed. "Leave a soldier have a slight misunderstanding with one of the dock-wallopers in there, and there's Benny, swinging a bung-starter and screaming for the law. How could we ever forget him?"

"I wouldn't want him to forget us, either," Sully said. "Lovely night, isn't it?"

"'Swonderful," Big John agreed.

Sully grinned. They'd have things to remember. A card for Deuce, an ulcer for Nick, and a lump or two for Benny. "Let's shake it up," he said.

CROSSING the barracks area, they mounted the wooden steps of the battalion headquarters. Typewriters clattered as they passed. Sharp voices

Streamline Swartz was on his feet, two corporals standing

barked directives as the wearied staff wound up post business.

With the combatants' contempt for the keepers of records, they strode toward a familiar door. Sully knocked and they entered on a curt, "Come in."

"Sergeant Sullivan, and Corporals Ross and Milano report to the battalion commander," he announced.

Sully thought the Old Man looked a bit weary. Worrying about the boys getting back by midnight, no doubt. Well, barring complications, they'd be out of Bumboat Benny's in time to help round up the stragglers.

"This afternoon I made my final report to the commanding general," the Colonel said. "It was very impressive. He looked at me with that keen sympathy and splendid understanding that characterizes our general officers. 'You're three noncommissioned officers overstrength, aren't you?' he asked. This I admitted, assuming we'd absorb the grades. . . . Er—you may stand at ease."

The room seemed warmer than when they'd entered, and the suggested position less comfortable than might be expected.

"Long exposure to your own incomparable prevarications should have prepared me, Sullivan," the Colonel continued. "But pride dulls the intellect. 'You've done a fine job, Hendricks,' the General said. 'Your officers and noncoms are to be highly commended. And by the way,' he asked, 'who *is* your best sergeant?' "

THE little man stirred uneasily. "Did I remember that no matter how they look on the magazine covers, all general officers were once battalion commanders?" the Colonel demanded. "Did I recall that pirating personnel was old stuff in the Army when John L. Lewis had calluses on his hands? No! 'Either Sullivan or Swartz sir,' I said. The General smiled, and I knew I should have nominated the battalion eight-ball. I'm sorry, Sullivan."

"But, sir," Sully protested, "surely you can't mean me?"

"Not only you," the Colonel said, "but also Corporal Ross, and Corporal Milano. You'll safeguard the battalion's post property, turn it over to, and be absorbed in, the replacement outfit due here next week."

The veins swelled in Tony's face. Big John's mouth worked wordlessly.

"But, sir," the little man implored. "We—we're combat soldiers."

"So is Sergeant Swartz and his corporals," the Colonel said, "—though up to now all of you have confined

by him. "And I'll say it again," Streamline boomed.

your combat operations to the less savory night-spots."

"But why us, sir?" Big John wailed. "This is war, aint it? I can lick Streamline Swartz and any two of his corporals the best day they ever see. And Tony here could put 'em in his pocket."

"A not entirely unconsidered factor," the Colonel acknowledged. He turned to Sully, and the little man's heart shriveled at the finality in his commanding officer's tone.

"After the old—er—gentleman had outmaneuvered me," the Colonel explained, "I could, in fairness to you both, consider only your respective records. From Baltimore to the New York Port of Embarkation, from Panama to San Diego! The similarity was amazing; a trail of broken glass and broken noses. I could almost hear the sirens scream."

He nodded toward Big John. "Confirming Corporal Ross' statement, your Casualty Inflicted list was longer. This seeming disadvantage was offset, however, by the fact that your list was almost entirely composed of crooked gamblers, of questionable saloon-keepers, and of proprietors of various clip-joints."

AFRAID to look at John or Tony, the little man stared at the floor.

"In contrast," the Colonel continued, "Sergeant Swartz appeared motivated by a marked reluctance to accept Mr. Stalin's statement that the Third Internationale had been dissolved. This obsession resulted in a marked hostility to members of the waterfront unions. There was only one solution."

That the Colonel had always been rigidly fair, that even now the scales were not tipped against them, Sully knew. But his faith in his commander could not anesthetize the pain that throbbed in his throat.

"I simply added up the complaints," the Colonel said. "You were one ahead. A club in Baltimore. Oddly enough, Sergeant Swartz was also there. You were ordered out by the police. Sergeant Swartz left; you did not. The complaint listed, among other things, resisting arrest and inflicting multiple contusions on five duly appointed officers of the law."

"Then there's no chance, sir?" Sully questioned.

"Not unless Sergeant Swartz should involve himself between now and midnight," the Colonel said. "In which event, he has been advised of the consequences."

The little man held out his hand. "Good-by, sir," he said thickly, while

John and Tony mumbled the amenities.

"Let's save it for tomorrow," the Colonel said. "Till then you're still in my outfit."

Silently they scuffed their way back to the now empty Noncoms' Room.

"So Streamline takes lip from a cop," Tony muttered. "So we get left behind. All on account of a cop. One lousy cop."

"Five," the little man corrected.

"How can he do this to us, Sully?" Big John moaned.

"The Colonel is a soldier," Sully said. "He's proud of this outfit. He—"

"He'd oughta be," Big John roared. "It's the best rifle company in the battalion. Look at th' Day Room. Full o' cups and medals. And who hauls in all that hardware?"

The little man shrugged.

"We did. Maybe we do get in a little trouble, once in a while. But look at the good we do. We help all the guys. We're—er—"

"Public benefactors?" the little man suggested sourly.

"Yah," Big John agreed. "The game is crooked, we tear up the tables. The treatment aint polite, we—"

"John," Tony said, "aint we feeling bad enough?"

"But, fellers," Big John persisted, "what'd this outfit be without us?"

"The best rifle company in the battalion," the little man said.

"What do we do now, Sully?"

For the first time in their four years together, Sully had no answer for Big John's question. No plan, no words of comfort. Tomorrow the outfit would entrain, heading for an unknown port. Their outfit! And to the regular Army man, there is no other outfit.

The room seemed dark, and poorly ventilated. The little man stood up. Anything would be better than this. "We'll go to town," he said, with no thought now of Nick, or Deuce, or Bumboat Benny. "Walk around, see a few of the boys."

HIDING his despair, he moved out the doorway. In the company street Tony and John fell in beside him, each with a hand on the little man's shoulders. He forced himself to step out briskly. "At least we're still together," he said.

The First Sergeant hailed them as they passed the Orderly Room. "The lads'll be beering themselves this night," he said. "So whatever you're doing at eleven o'clock, quit doing it."

"I don't get it, Paddy," Sully said.

"I want those lads back by midnight," the First Sergeant said. "Round 'em up. Drive 'em in. I was going to get Streamline to help you, but the big-nosed son ducked out on me. And if you're a bit late yourselves," he added, "it'll be all right."

Tony choked, and the sharp retort died on Sully's lips. So the Top didn't know they were being left behind?

"Okay, Paddy," Sully said.

"Good night, lads," the Top replied. "See you in the morning."

"The Old Man didn't tell him," Big John burst out.

"The Old Man is a pretty white guy," Tony said slowly.

Inwardly Sully thanked the Colonel for this last kindness. Spared now from an ordeal of questioning, they could hide their hurt. No one knew they were being left behind. "Till then you're still in my outfit," the Colonel had said. They'd get the boys back in time. "Let's go," he snapped.

Heads high, they strode to the bus stop.

But this warming lift, this last chance for service could not sustain them through the evening. Moodily they walked the streets.

A long-legged blonde tripped by, her cocktail gown a challenge to the elements. But Big John's whistle stemmed from chivalry alone. A group of sailors jostled Tony, and the little man's mouth was grim, as Big John stared straight ahead and Tony mumbled, "Sorry."

In a tiny bar they watched the clock, untouched drinks before them. At eleven, Sully rose. "Let's go," he said. "We'll work our way downtown."

Wherever lights shone brightly, they found the men of their outfit. Wherever music played or glasses tinkled, doughboys waved them greeting. They went from place to place, tapping arms, giving low-voiced orders. Soldiers got up from tables, climbed down from bar stools, relinquished dancing-partners. At Sully's command, a grinning youngster drained his glass. "Okay, Sergeant," he said. "See you in the morning."

A husky rifleman slapped Tony's back. The company bugler grinned up at John. "See you in the morning, Corporal."

Big John's eyes were haggard, Tony's dark face grim. "We've made all the better joints," he said. "Think any of the boys are giving their sucker blood a workout?"

The little man shrugged wearily. "We'll look," he said.

Turning from the lighted area, they plodded through the streets. Beyond a row of darkened warehouses they stood before Deuce Daniels' place. The tinny rhythm of a badly tuned piano sounded from the lower floor.

"Might be somebody upstairs," Big John said. "Though what sense there is in gambling when you're—"

"Let's go," the little man snapped.

They crossed the first floor lounge, a scowling strong-arm hurrying after them. Sully nodded, and Big John's arm swung in a backhand blow. But despair had taken its weakening hold, and ricocheting off the wall, the strong-arm saved himself from falling by clutching to the bar.

The little man sighed. "Let's go."

SEVEN men looked up from a poker table as they crowded into an upstairs room. Behind them the doorman angrily regained his balance.

A deck of cards held in his hand, Deuce Daniels' thin lips tightened. "What's the idea?" he demanded.

Ignoring Deuce, Sully scanned the others. Two housemen, three chaps he didn't know, and a boy from Tony's squad. "Get going, kid," he said. "Deuce, cash this soldier in."

"Aw, Sergeant," the soldier pleaded, "just this last hand."

Sully glanced at the soldier's cards. A four-heart flush, one card to come. And with Deuce dealing, and a single houseman holding cards in opposition. The little man smiled mirthlessly. "Split the pot," he said.

"Where do you think you are?" Daniels snarled. "I'm no two-bit operator you can—"

"Let's skip your success story, Deuce," Sully said. "Split the pot, and cash that soldier in."

Tony and Big John moved toward the table.

Contemptuously, Sully watched Daniels take the percentage players' choice. Splitting the pot in even stacks, Deuce added one to the pile the soldier pushed across the table. Eyes smoldering, he paid off.

"So-long, fellers," the soldier said. "See you in the morning."

Deuce glared at Sully. "Anything else you wanted, Sullivan?"

Reaching across the table, Sully removed the top card from the deck—the card that Daniels would have dealt the soldier. In pained regret for the joy they might have known, he held the pasteboard up. The deuce of spades! "Shall we?" he debated.

Tony shrugged. "Might as well," he muttered.

Big John's hands closed on Daniels' skull, thumbs well under the jawbone. "Open your chopper," he growled.

The little man tore the card in half, and then in quarters.

At Deuce's strangled yelp, the doorman charged. Tony's short left described a graceful arc. But there was no heart in the punch and the doorman went only to his knees.

Glumly they slouched their way downstairs. "If we could'a' rammed that card home with Streamline's smeller, we'd'a' had something," Tony

mourned. "Where we going now, Sully? Nick's?"

The little man nodded. At a happier hour he had promised John that things would be different at Nick's. They were. Even the bus boys scowled as they entered.

But no amount of flattery could wipe away their gloom. Thinking only of the outfit, they searched Nick's place for soldiers—soldiers who'd soon be conking krautheads, while they stayed behind. For as Big John said: "A guy takes lip from a cop, and what chance've we got?"

At a corner table they found two members of the Third Platoon. "Get going, doughboys," Sully said.

Flush-faced, the tallest tapped an empty glass. "Got a drink coming," he offered.

Sully saw Nick hurrying toward them, two bouncers at his back. "Get going," he snapped.

The tall one grinned. "Come on, Charley," he said. "See you in the morning, Sully."

Nick's button eyes were coldly hostile. "You think I have to take stuff like that?" he challenged.

Tony looked at the bouncers. "You could put those apes in the zoo, and make an honest living," he suggested.

With only fleeting interest, Sully stared at Nick. "We're going now," he said. "Good night, Nick."

"And who pays for those drinks?" Nick demanded, waving at an advancing waiter.

Sully watched the waiter place two glasses on the table. Two whisky sours, concocted from ingredients that would have frightened Michael Finn. Sadly the little man recalled the things they'd planned, the memories they'd hoped to cherish. Tossing a bill on the waiter's tray, he looked at John, and then at Tony. "Sit down, Nick," he whispered.

Moving easily, Tony wrapped an arm around Nick's neck, fingers closing on Nick's nose. "You heard what Sully said," he growled.

Underestimating Big John's reach, Nick's followers made their bid.

Grasping a bouncer in either hand, the big one's arms swung wide. With smooth technique he brought his hands together, the bouncers' noggins ringing soundly. But craftsmanship comes from the soul, and only one lost consciousness. In shame John thrust them from him, careless where they fell.

Fingertips pressed to his lips, the waiter looked at Nick. "That's a terrible thing to do," he cautioned. "That stuff aint fit to drink."

At Nick's last convulsive swallow, Tony released his hold.

"He'll keep nicely now," the little man said. "Let's go."

"A nice score," the M. P. conceded. "You want to run it up, or will you walk out to the truck?"

THEY headed toward the waterfront, Sully in the lead.

"It's nearly twelve," Tony said. "Any use stopping in at Benny's?"

"Naw," Big John protested; "who'd be simple enough to wind up in that lousy deadfall?"

"We would," Tony said.

"Yah," Big John insisted, "but we, we're—er—"

"Exactly," Sully said. "And there may be other simple souls."

The double doors of Benny's place opened on the highway. They crossed the road, a steady hum of voices mounting as they neared. A shouted comment rose above the babel, as they moved inside the door. The talking stopped. A laugh choked off, and Bumboat Benny reached beneath the bar.

Alert, they scanned the tables, puzzled at the silence. But no one looked their way.

From a table in the corner, a familiar voice sang out. Streamline Swartz was on his feet, two corporals standing by him. "And I'll say it again," Streamline boomed. "All longshoremen stink!"

Chairs scraped and glasses fell. The workers of the waterfront boiled up from the tables, while Bumboat Benny ran around his bar, a wooden mallet in his hand.

"And guys like us, always minding our own business, we get left behind," Tony stated bitterly.

"What d'you expect from a guy that takes lip from cops?" Big John burst out. "Imagine needling those dockwallopers like that? Why don't he tell 'em one at a time?"

Very proper reasoning, Sully conceded, as he watched Streamline and his corporals stem the workers' rush.

"This is one jam he won't walk out on," Tony said.

"Yah," Big John agreed. "And what was it the Old Man said about Streamline involving himself, Sully?"

Sully's mouth went dry. Beyond

the milling workers, he could see Streamline's head, and the tops of two bobbing field caps.

"They wind up in the can, and it'll be them that's left behind," Tony muttered, looking at the floor.

Bumboat Benny's mallet rose and fell, and only one field cap bobbed at Streamline's side.

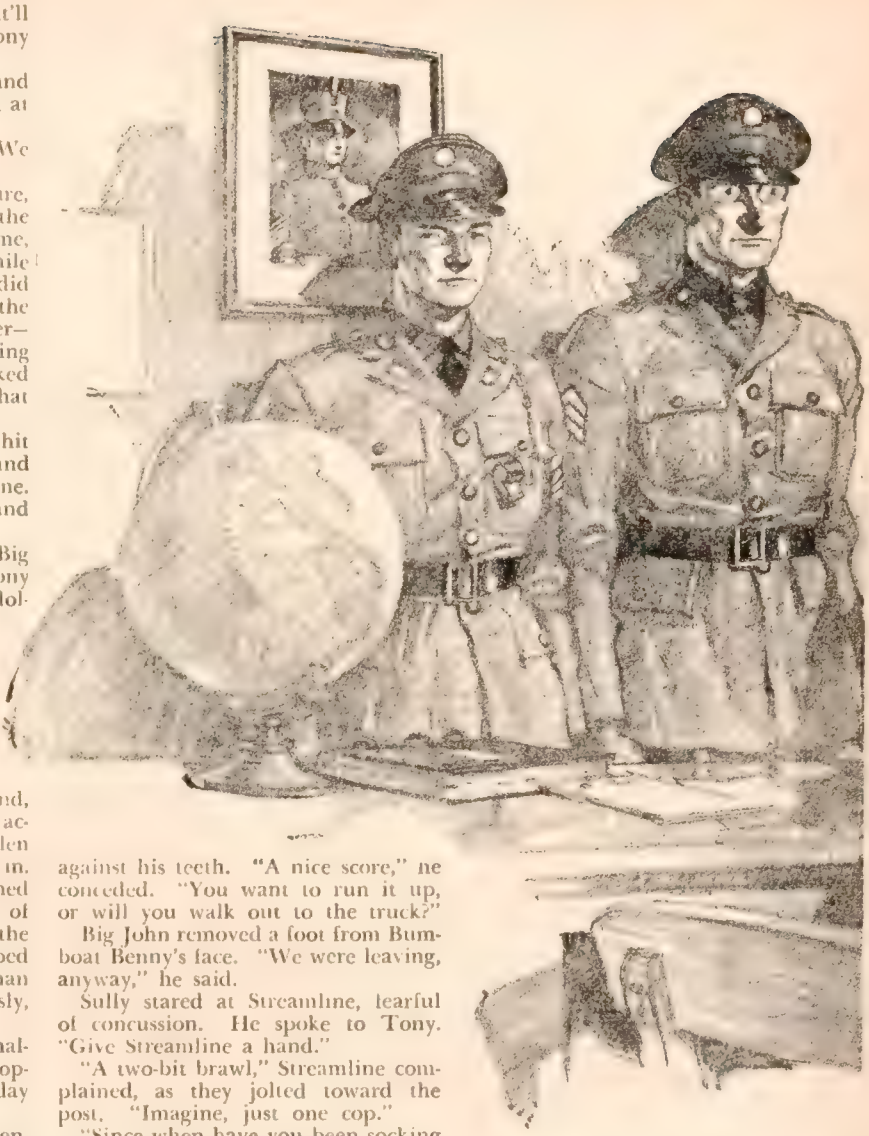
Big John shuffled nervously. "We could ease out," he said.

The little man wet his lips. Sure, they could walk out. Go back to the post. And when morning came, they'd be leaving with the outfit, while Streamline stayed behind. What did they owe Streamline? Wasn't he the only man in the outfit who'd ever— The outfit. Their outfit. Thrusting his hands in his pockets, he looked up at John and Tony. "Well, what are you waiting for?" he snapped.

Roaring encouragement, they hit the rear of the surging mass and plowed their way to Streamline. "Hiya, fellers," he panted. "Me and Mr. Pegler aint doing so good."

They moved in beside him, Big John's long arms pumping, Tony grunting with each hook. Two dollars' worth of nickels in each hand, the little man punched fast and accurately. Behind them the fallen corporal struggled up and joined in.

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley



The longshoremen broke, reformed and charged again, their weight of numbers forcing the doughboys to the wall. A chopping blow dropped Sully. Tony jerked the little man to his feet, then swinging furiously, cleared a space before them.

Bumboat Benny darted in, his mallet raised. Spearing Benny on a looping left, Big John let go his Sunday pitch.

Loud shouts sounded from the entrance. A blue-clad flatfoot hustled through the door, a squad of M.P.'s at his heels. In the best police tradition, the cop displayed his tonsils. "Break it up," he yelled. Those longshoremen still erect, gave way before the challenge, exposing Streamline who stood right hand cocked, blood dripping from his nose.

M.P.'s fanned out, cutting off escape. The cop advanced on Streamline. "Stand right where you are," the cop commanded, thrusting out his jaw.

A very fair right-handed puncher, Streamline gave his all.

Big John gasped. Tony jumped, and Sully's eyes went wide. The cop collapsed, face forward, on the floor.

The M.P. sergeant tapped his club against his teeth. "A nice score," he conceded. "You want to run it up, or will you walk out to the truck?"

Big John removed a foot from Bumboat Benny's face. "We were leaving, anyway," he said.

Sully stared at Streamline, fearful of concussion. He spoke to Tony. "Give Streamline a hand."

"A two-bit brawl," Streamline complained, as they jolted toward the post. "Imagine, just one cop."

"Since when have you been socking cops?" Big John demanded sourly.

Who? Streamline?" a corporal snorted. "He always socks cops."

"Since when?" Tony insisted.

"Oh, you mean that time in Baltimore, at Packy's Paradise. Tell him, Streamline."

Streamline spread his hands. "What could I do?" he asked. "The slob is married to my sister."

In silence, Tony placed a hand on Streamline's knee. Big John's arm went around the corporal's. "How you doing, guys?" he asked.

But the little man's relief was tempered by his sorrow. He should have known, of course. No man with wabble in his blood could wear the outfit's stripes. "Either Sullivan or Swartz," the Colonel had reported. And they were still one up on Streamline. The little man sighed deeply. "And as usual," he murmured, "the Old Man will do it by the numbers."

"The Old Man?" Streamline cut in. "I was talking to'm, right after chow. And Sully, I think the old boy's going screwy."

"He aint got far to go," the M.P. sergeant said. "The General's in his office now. Some lug from Daniels' joint gets the General out of bed. And he's hardly got his silk sheets pulled up again, when there's another call from Nick's. Last time I see him, he was running out of words."

A libelous statement, disrespectful, and untrue. . . .

"Your best sergeants," the General purred. "Well, take 'em with you!" he roared. "Get 'em off my post!"

Backs to the wall, they lined the Old Man's office, while behind his desk, the Colonel stood stiffly at attention.

"And these," the General purred, "these are your noncoms. Three of whom I so kindly offered to absorb, in order to relieve you of the paper work incident to overstrength."

His quivering finger brushed Streamline's nose, and settled on the little man. "Your best sergeants," he said, his voice low with the calm before hysteria. "Well, take 'em with you!" he roared, stamping to the door. "Get 'em off my post!"

The little man released a long held breath. The Colonel mopped his brow. "Dismissed," he said. "I'll see you in the morning."

Saluting happily, they fled.

"He's screwy," Streamline said. "Only a screwball'd jam himself up with the General like that. What was old spit-and-polish mumbling about?"

"I thought the Colonel conducted himself with considerable dignity," Sully said, evading the question.

"You did huh? Look, right after chow he nails me. 'Tonight,' he says, 'find Sullivan. And when you find him,' he says, 'involve yourself in a row that'll bring out the riot-squad.' Is that the proper attitude for a battalion commander?"

A lump gathered in Sully's throat.

"Just like that," Streamline went on. "'Find him,' he says, just like this is a one-street town. Good thing I hear you mention Benny's. Screwy, that's what he is."

"Yah," Big John contended, "but he's always got us solid guys to carry him."

"Good night, fellers," Tony said. "We'll do this again sometime."

Streamline grinned. "There aint any cops where we're going," he said.

"So what?" Big John reminded. "M.P.'s we always got."

The little man swallowed hastily. They were solid guys all right, every one of them. Solid guys, commanded by the grandest screwball that any army ever saw. "Good night, Streamline," he called softly. "See you in the morning."

VENGEANCE *in the*

NIGHT

by Michael Gallister

"Cry havoc—and let slip the dogs of war!" **might well have been the battle-cry of this war-dog battalion of the Marine Parachute raiders.**

The Story Thus Far:

HAD anyone seen us coming down in the gathering darkness, he would certainly have been puzzled. Lefty Moore was just beyond me, and it was impossible to see where the man began and the Great Dane left off. I had no time to watch Lefty and Duke, however; I had Blitz in my arms and he was licking my face. Then we were down, in thorny patches of pandanus scrub stretching to the shore and the patch of naked rocks that was our rendezvous.

Before we hit the ground, the bombers had disappeared, the raid was over, the sky was empty. There we were, a hundred and twenty men and forty dogs; those without dogs were special-weapons men, and all of us were demolition experts. The War Dog Battalion was on its first operation inside enemy territory.

The place was Selat Itam, on the west coast of Borneo, a small but choice oil-field between Tarakan and Balikpapan. Our prime objective was an irregular oblong half a mile in length and half as wide, surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. It was constantly patrolled, day and night, and the Japs had dogs. The oil-storage dumps, pumps, barracks, and radio station lay directly on the river-bank. Two miles upstream lay the old town of Selat Itam itself.

We made our way to a rendezvous among the rocks near the shore and dug in out of sight, for the attack was not scheduled till the following night. Two submarines were to call later for what was left of us. Instructions were well whipped over, you can bet.

Lefty, Slim and I got together on details, since they were to follow directly behind me. Because I happened to have exceptional night vision, I had been chosen for the point.

Cox had been here before as an intelligence officer, and he explained:

"This Dutchman Kronboom," he said, "was resident here—*contrôleur*, the Dutch call it. He expected war and appealed to certain American authorities. For us to take any overt action was, of course, out of the question then. Same over in the Philippines. Just the same, MacArthur was taking what action he could. From here, you know, it's a very short distance across the straits to Mindanao.

"Benson," he went on to say, "was doing things over in Mindanao; Kronboom was doing things here in Dutch Borneo. And Cox, with his wife, was quite unofficially sent here to coördinate with Kronboom.

"The war caught us here—Benson had come over from Mindanao to confer with me," Cox went on. "There was no getting away. He had an infected leg from an insect bite. My wife was down with fever and I could not leave her. Later on, it was too late. . . . Benson was still too sick to be moved. He stayed. Whether he's here now, I don't know; but I must find out. That brings us to the job in hand—except, I should say, Benson was dead in love with one of Kronboom's girls.

"As you know, probably, the Dutch falsified the ordinary charts of the islands about here," he went on. "They themselves used secret charts, some of which we now have, others not. Kronboom, if still alive, knows where a complete set exists; he had 'em cached out when I was here. They'll be of inestimable value to us. Also, he himself had made caches of arms and drugs and other things, against the evil day. Benson was doing the same thing in Mindanao. Unfortunately, Benson is the only person alive who knows of his work. That information, too, we must have. Our job is to find those two men and bring them out of that concentration camp."

The attack began on schedule. We got through the wire silently, killed the first sentries without an alarm. Then Blitz stepped on my foot, increased the pressure, and pointed off to the right. An officer and dog were coming—next minute they were in sight, a dark blotch approaching down the road! *(The story continues in detail:)*

JUST how Slim Cogswell managed it, I did not learn until later. All I could see was that the Jap officer and his dog came to a halt, then seemed to separate. As a matter of fact, it was a good gamble that the Jap dogs were nothing like so keenly

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trained as were our own pups, and Slim took the chance.

If the Jap dog smelled him, it would have meant an alarm, sure. So Lefty just made a scurry in the dirt, and the Jap dog darted into the brush to investigate it. That was his finish, because Glory's massive jaws clamped into his throat, and Lefty's knife slid between his ribs.

The officer, naturally suspecting, spoke sharply to the dog. A man must be suspicious and on the alert before he is keyed up to fighting pitch. As no answer came, the officer damned the dog and followed to get him back.

Illustrated by John E. Costigan, N. A.

I could see a shadow rise and merge with him. I could hear a slight grunt. Then there was only silence, and the queer whisperlike rustling of the casuarina trees. Presently something moved, and out in the open toward me came Slim and Glory.

I could give my attention now to the *M* guard, and Lefty. There was not a thing to be seen. Slim came along, and I sent him back to give word for the advance: all was clear now. No sign came from that lighted window. As I waited, a bugle began to blow, over at the barracks, giving a call of some sort.

As it proved, it was the equivalent of our Taps. The enemy was bedding down for the night.

Slim rejoined me. And to my joy, something moved at that lighted window. The light came to it, moved across the window, then was extinguished. Lefty Moore had done his work.

We headed straight for our objective now. Behind us came a rustle and a *pad-pad* of feet; the whole gang was in, was spreading out, was making for the various objectives. This meant slow work to come, just the same, because the Jap sentries up and down the line had to be silenced.

The glow of light toward the river went down to dim. The barracks was darkened, and only occasional lights remained along the docks. What was going on there was none of our affair. We had our objective. Butch Hartley and St. John, the Navajo, would come along with our rifles and the heavy stuff. As soon as we had distributed time-bombs through the storehouse, we could move ahead for the radio station. All time-bombs were set to go off at 05:00 hours, figuring that by daybreak we would either be in full command of the situation or else out of luck. If we could postpone discovery until then, so much the better.

AT the building, Lefty met us. Leaving Slim to watch for Butch and St. John, I went with Lefty to a door at the end of the building. We went in and closed the door.

"No moving around, Buck," said Lefty. "It's a mess. Two ringtails here—I shivied one and Duke got the other. How's things?"

"All shipshape." I sensed something wrong. "What is it?"

"My Jap clawed me," he said, "and I went into my first-aid kit to put some iodine on my arm—he drew blood. Take a look at your kit."

I complied, knowing there was some reason back of this, coming at such a moment. It was pitch black here, of course, but we were trained to work in darkness. My fingers went over everything. . . . . All there.

"Nothing missing," I said.

"Nope, not till you yen for it," said Lefty. "Brandy okay?"

The little two-ounce brandy bottle was there. I shook it.

"Hello! Bottle's here; nothing in it. What's the answer?"

"Same with mine. It was okay last night when I checked everything. Somebody's been the rounds and put the slug on it."

"And done it last night or today when the field packs were lying around."

"Listen, Buck," said Lefty. "It wasn't an ordinary case of needing a drink, savvy? It was somebody who needed to needle himself up tonight—or thought he would."

"I get it."

His reasoning was sound. In one sense, it was a damned dirty thing to steal first-aid brandy from men who might need it, and probably would, before another few hours had passed; but nobody in the outfit would do such a thing merely for the sake of a drink or two. However, take some man who was inwardly looking forward to this night's work with fear and trembling, and who dared not show it, some man whose nerves were shaken and gone, perhaps by the plane flight here: Desperate, he might well seek Dutch courage.

"How far it's gone, how many kits got a shakedown, there's no telling," I said slowly. "Let it pass, Lefty. Might be a damn' sight more important."

"Right," said he. "But it's something for the book, at that, huh? And something to keep in mind. Any guy who needs the stuff that bad is liable to drop his guts in a pinch."

"We've got other things to do than worry about a slug of *sake*. Let's shove."

We went back outside. It was a relief to have been able to talk for a minute or two. Everything was quiet as the grave. Slim was with the dogs, and St. John had come up. Butch Hartley was placing the time-bombs; as soon as he got through, we were ready to be off for the radio station.

In order to reach it, our best plan would be to leave the roadway and cut straight to the right. There were a few trees, some light brush, but nothing heavy in the way, and we would be less likely to run into any of our own crowd. It would be part of our job, of course, to silence anything we might come upon in the way of Japanese animal life.

It was queer, to stand there under the silent stars and to know how, through the darkness, our squads were stealing along to do their work—and never a sound to tell of it! If all the sentries could be wiped out with no alarm, it would be wonderful, though almost too much to hope for.

I THOUGHT of the man Benson, in the concentration-camp, and wondered whether he was still alive, and what he might be doing this night when men of his own race were so near and trying to reach him. And Kronboom and his two daughters—somehow I felt that I knew them all. The night breeze carried to us the river smell, a touch of the far jungle. The dogs were getting all kinds of things from that breeze, probably scents from the town and camp upriver. Well, even if we never used those dogs again, they had already more than justified all their training.

Butch appeared. He spread his hands open to show the bombs were all gone, and bent over his load; he and St. John still bore our weapons and would until we needed them. I headed away from the road; Slim and Lefty followed; Butch and St. John brought up the rear. There was wire on the far side of the rectangle, perhaps with sentries; I did not want to hit that, but I wanted to avoid the scattered buildings and godowns and head directly for the radio station.

We had covered perhaps fifty feet and were well in among the scattered brush, when Blitz alerted and gave me the danger signal. I just did not credit it; I thought the signal must have been accidental. There was nothing ahead to indicate any danger. It was dark in the brush, and I could see a little group of small trees, but nothing was moving. I started on, and Blitz signaled again.

I halted, found Slim's hand, and consulted him. Glory had alerted also. This made it a certainty that danger of some sort lay directly ahead. We waited, and nothing happened, nothing could be seen. No sentry was moving about, at any event.

We were all clumped together by this time. It seemed evident enough that whatever the peril ahead might be, it was centered on the group of little trees. The scrub was dark, but it was open enough to see there was nothing to right or left.

"Keep the dogs here," I told Slim. They had served their purpose by warning us, and now we could do better without them. Leaving him to control all three dogs, I had Butch and St. John unload the gear, and with Lefty, we spread out and started forward on our stomachs, converging on the trees.

We had barely started, when I knew we had done right; from that little clump came a man's soft, throaty laugh. More than one Jap was there, obviously. Why? Doing what? This we had to discover.

As we separated, I was close to Butch for an instant—and from him caught one whiff that pretty near bowled me over. Brandy, yes; for a minute I missed the implication; then it hit me full force as I crawled forward. Too late now to do anything about it, or to keep Butch back. So it was Butch who had robbed the kits! Probably he had gulped the last of the brandy just now.

For a minute I was furious, then could only pray that no harm would come of it, Poor Butch—tough citizen that he was, he had probably known he was going to crack and had tried to stiffen himself.

However, I had to pay attention to business. That crawl was slow and careful; I could feel the tension mounting as I inched forward. The result of everything might well depend on what happened right here, as we all knew. Closer came the little group of trees, and a murmur of low voices reached my ears, and another laugh. A voice lifted slightly.

"Watch in case the captain comes, Ito. Give me some more from the new bottle."

There was some more, but it was colloquial Japanese and I could not make it out; this, however, was enough to give me the idea. Here were some Japs finishing a bottle or two of *sake*, after regulation hours. Listening to the voices, I could distinguish three. The odor of cigarette smoke drifted to me also.

Just a casual little group of soldiers who had sneaked off among the trees for a few drinks and a smoke and a gam—and they threatened to spoil the whole works for us! I looked for my three companions and saw nothing of them, but they must be close, I knew.

A moment later a soldier stepped out from the trees. He stood there leaning against a tree and exchanging low-voiced gossip with the others. I could smell liquor; he was sipping from a cup as he stood there. And there was no immediate prospect of his departing. The one good thing was that he was watching for his officer, and not on the alert for anyone else.

I inched forward, then lay dead still and waited. If the four of us attacked together, we could probably finish off these Japs. The glow of a cigarette came from among the trees. It was too open just ahead to risk an advance with that Jap standing there. For the moment we were held up, for until he went back under cover of the trees, we could make no move. The others would realize this also, I knew.

So I listened to their talk, of which I could savvy snatches only. They were joking about three companies who had gone on a practice march; and like the dumb knucklehead that I was, I did not attach any importance to it. Looking back at it all, I find it hard to excuse my own lack of ordinary sense; and before many hours had passed, it was going to cost us all dear.

What worried me, at the back of my mind, was the necessity of getting to the radio tower and then on upriver after Cox. I was thinking of this when one of the Japs cracked a joke, and they all fell to laughing. As they did so, I was horrified to hear a voice from my right.

"I can't stand it! I tell you, I can't stand it! I can take care of that guy—lemme go, you dumb cluck! You can't stop me. Leggo of me—"

THAT froze me, if anything ever did; it was the voice of Butch. Luckily, the Jap in front of the trees heard nothing, because of his own laughter; he was flinging some comment at his companions and had turned his back.

Something was happening, only a few feet to the right of me; and I was only too dreadfully certain what it was. Butch had caved in under the strain, and the brandy. He had lost his head. I waited, every nerve taut. If he jumped for that Jap, it meant the alarm would be given—it meant lives lost for a good many of us, perhaps the whole task botched and all of us done for.

The seconds dragged like hours. I was sweating as I lay and waited for it to happen. But it did not. There was a slight scuffle. I heard a queer grunt that made my blood run cold somehow—perhaps I sensed subconsciously what was going on. And as I lay, I

prayed hard that Butch would not make the jump. Such insane folly would ruin us all. Either Lefty or St. John must be trying to restrain him.

"Lord, don't let him go crazy!" I muttered to myself. "Hold him, *hold* him!"

Suddenly I found myself all in a tremble, and with an effort got myself in hand. Next thing, I would be the one to crack: it scared me. I calmed down, and then that Jap turned around and spoke to his comrades. He wanted more wine, and the captain was not around, and he did not intend to stand there all night.

The minute he merged with the darkness, I was edging forward. Now we could act: the tension was lifted. I came close to the trees, saw black shadow-patches to my right, and knew the others were ready. Next instant I was at the trees and out of the starlight. There in front of me, a match flared to light a cigarette, and I saw three Jap faces close together.

I rose up, reached out and touched the rising shape on my right. It was St. John. I gave him a prod. He understood and reached out in turn. Then we moved in and struck.

There must have been some noise, of course, but I was aware of none at the moment. Nor was I aware that there were only three of us, and not four. I had picked my Jap, the one with the match, and I got him and took him down with me, and that was that. Somebody fell on top of me, and I rolled clear and got to my feet.

Under those trees it was too dark to see much of anything. Everything was quiet, and that showed the job was done. I ventured a word, even against orders.

"Wait."

Low grunts answered. I turned and headed back for Slim and the dogs, feeling very pleased with everything. The crisis was past—and it had been a crisis. There was a new one every minute in this business. . . .

My foot struck against something, and I stopped, looking down at a dark splotch in the starlight. A horrible certainty took hold of me. I squatted and reached for an outflung hand, and felt the wrist. There was no pulse, but the pungent odor of brandy lifted to my nostrils, as I cut loose his dog-tag and pocketed it.

It was not my prayer to the Lord that had silenced Butch Hartley.

Chapter Six

IT may seem shocking to admit that my thoughts were not so much about what had been done, as they were about who had done it.

In an outfit such as ours, a man ceases to be an individual: he is a cog in a machine. If the cog cracks in two, it must be knocked out and replaced before it destroys the whole machine. We had all been drilled in the grim necessity of this.

What brought regret into my mind was the probability that Lefty Moore had been forced to this action: I had a rather boyish regard for Lefty, as a ball-player, a hero who could do nothing out of line. To kill one of your mates, even to save all the others, is something out of line from a standpoint of human ethics; it was Roman, Spartan, and it had occurred before this in our corps; but none of us liked to think about it. I doubt if I could have done it myself.

Yet the necessity was there. The effects of this action, and of its alternative, did not only touch us in the immediate present. They reached out to touch the whole task on which we were engaged; they touched upon Cox and Benson, upon Kronboom and his daughters, even the war itself: they were like the ripples that went out from a stone heaved into a millpond, reaching out in circles and breaking upon the shores all around. We had been trained to realize this. Yet when I recall how, a little while ago, Lefty had sent me for Butch and had sat talking with him, all differences made up and forgotten, it made me flinch just the same. No other explanation occurred to me.

I located Slim Cogswell, gave him the O.K. signal and we picked up the loads. With the three dogs, we made

tracks to the trees and rejoined the others. Here we divided up the weapons. For such a gang as ours, there is no standard weapon; all types are used, since all types of fighting are encountered. I myself had a chopper—a submachine-gun—with a hundred-cartridge drum.

REISINGS, which caused woe at Guadalcanal, had come back into favor since the adoption of the improved clip. The honey of them all was the new M-1 30-caliber carbine, but only a few of these had reached our corps. Not even the grenades were standardized, for some of the gang had got hold of the Australian grenade with wrist-strap that pulled the pin en route to the objective.

I said nothing about the late happenings, and thought that nobody noticed anything wrong. But as we started out again, Lefty Moore grabbed my arm and put his lips to my ear.

"Where's Butch?"

"You ought to know," I said at his ear. He let go, and we were on our way once more.

Our first objective had been attained, and we were well on toward the second, but it did seem that we had been a terribly long time about it. I was to get to the radio station with my squad as quickly as possible—and yet we were not to hurry doing it. This apparent contradiction was actually quite clear, and meant that we were to neglect no precaution getting there. Once there, I was to await orders from the Old Man before moving off after Cox, who would keep in touch with Major Lang by means of the handy-talkie.

HOWEVER, other squads had their own problems; it proved that while our advance seemed frightfully slow to us, the others had been slower still. The orders were not being taken lightly. Our lives, and more than our lives, were all at stake.

The four of us, making for the upstream corner of the rectangle, skirted the rear of what must have been an officers' club and huge bathhouse. The Japs are, of course, devoted to boiling hot baths taken in company, and had installed themselves a good

outfit here. We heard a couple of servants talking, and it appeared that some of the oil-field workers were here, and were not subject to military hours. They were apparently repairing damage done by our bombers.

Since this was no objective of ours, we slipped away and went on through the brush. We were clear of any other buildings by this time, for we were getting on toward the corner of the rectangle where the radio station was, and we went ahead with the utmost caution. It was well that we did, because Slim, who was off to my right, came against the wire fence there, and we heard a slight tinkle of glass fragments. At the same moment, Blitz warned me, and I halted.

Perhaps half a minute passed; then a voice sounded, and another made reply. Two Jap sentries were there, and one had heard the tinkle. He spoke to the other, who gave him an angry response to the effect that there was nothing to be alarmed about. A lighter flamed up; they were together, sneaking a drag on a cigarette.

I STARTED for them: sentries had to be disposed of, wherever met.

Worming forward, I made but slow progress. Blitz under full control but quivering with eagerness. The two sentries separated. I could just make out their shadowy figures some ten feet away. One went to the right, one to the left, back along their beats. The former must inevitably strike Slim, so I headed after the one on the left.

But Slim, unluckily, was not aware that there were two sentries. We were certainly coming up against trouble this night. My first realization of what threatened was on hearing his sentry speak, and Slim make answer; I knew his voice, even speaking Japanese. And he did not speak it any too well. The sentry on the left snapped out something, and it looked as though the game were up. I put down the submachine-gun; we had to act fast.

I gave Blitz the signal to go around and take the man. He vanished. I shoved straight ahead for the Jap, and got to him just as Blitz took him.

We all went down together, and the Nip let out one startled yap—just one.

HAD those brown devils been on the alert, the show would have been given away right then. I gained my feet and waited. Blitz gave me warning; then came a voice. That one stifled, choking word had caught the attention of an officer who was making his rounds. He came plunging for the spot, rapping out an angry question as he came. I made an indistinct reply in Japanese, and he walked right into it, literally.

One shocked and gasping breath escaped him, but I had him by his yellow throat. For a minute he fought like seven devils, and I thought the game was up for sure; luckily, Blitz nosed into the mix-up. His teeth savagely raked my left hand as they tore at the Jap's throat, but that settled the officer for keeps. Next thing I realized, I was sitting up, listening for the alarm to be raised, while Blitz licked the wounds he had given me.

The noise, the voices, must have been heard, I thought. Every nerve intent, I sat listening, ready to jump and recover my gun. And what did I hear? The voice of Jack Benny, and a burst of laughter!

I thought, for an instant, that I was out of my head; then came the answer. You know how, listening to a radio, someone will attempt to tune in better and will get a burst of noise. This was what had happened: Laughter, Japanese laughter, came from the officers' club. They had a radio there and were getting a short-wave program from home being sent out to our forces. . . . Those ringtails were enjoying the jokes, which most of them probably understood perfectly!

It was all so miraculous, and yet so utterly natural, that I just let out a long breath and could not move for a bit. There was no alarm whatever. Further, that outburst of sound from the club, which was quickly hushed, showed that none of our crowd had as yet gone to work in that quarter. Mind you, we had a very simple job, whereas some of the other squads had complex objectives, with nobody very sure of what might turn up, and sentries to be silenced everywhere. The Old Man had nothing to do but hit the radio station—but getting there would be a job in itself, as we were learning.

I pulled myself together, moved back to my submachine-gun, and got out my first-aid kit. Iodine bit into those tooth-marks on my hand, and I rubbed Blitz' head thankfully; he had intervened just right, and was welcome to give me a dozen such scratches under the same conditions.

From Slim, Lefty and St. John came not a sound, so I got up and started forward. I could see the high mesh of the radio tower lifting against the stars and knew we must be getting close to it. In the house beneath it was a gleam of light, and now we could see other lights along the docks, and one at the entrance of the big barracks. Blitz nosed along at heel.

Now for the first time I began to feel confident that we were going to pull the thing off, and it was a glorious feeling. Somewhere about this area were a hundred-odd men and forty dogs. Most of them by this time must be well at work, yet there was no sound of it to be heard, no alarm had been given, and I could not see a soul. I could not even make out any of my own squad, who must be somewhere close. The worth of our long training, the value of all we had been through, the untold thought and labor and expense behind this task of ours, was suddenly pointed up.

The scrub thinned out ahead; and there, a hundred yards or less distant, was the radio station in the starlight, its white-painted house distinct to the eye, its crosswork steel tower rising. I settled down beside Blitz. That open space had to be crossed, but it was not to be crossed in any hurry. As though to emphasize this, came voices and movement.

On the other side of the radio station from where I lay was a road and the river. The road was the one running up to Selat Itam, as Cox had described to me. To my left, it continued along past the docks and pumphouse and storage tanks. A branch turned off from it and went to the central barracks.

THE door of the radio station opened, and a beam of light fell upon a sentry outside. Three figures came out together, talking, and moved off toward the barracks. Other voices came from the road beyond. Here a liberty party was returning from the town upriver, and they were feeling high. The shadowy mass of them seemed to be about a dozen strong.

I lay there a long while, wishing I knew how the time was going. For the Old Man and his squad to make the radio station, except by the way I had come, seemed rankly impossible. Men were moving about here and there. Those just back from town stopped outside the barracks entrance; I could hear them talking and laughing. There did not seem to be any particularly rigorous military restrictions, or perhaps some of these Japs were oil-field workers.

However, it was important that the radio station be grabbed off without delay. If the Old Man had been held up en route, then the job was ours. Just then I heard a scrape of earth, and here came Slim and Glory edging up alongside. With the dogs at ease, we put our heads together. Now that we knew where we were and there was no danger of being overheard, we could consult, for our orders were always fluid, and took for granted a certain basic intelligence on our part.

We both knew that for the present the dogs were out of the picture, and we were in it. St. John and Lefty, said Slim, were just to the right.

"No sign of Butch," he added. I let that pass without comment.

"This is a stinker," I breathed at his ear. "Get your sentry back there?"

"Check. Give it a bye."

"All right. Get the picture ahead."

There was a sentry at the door of the radio house. There was another

on the road, where some sort of gate apparently closed the gap in the fence-line. This barbed wire ran close behind the radio station, and along to where we had struck those sentries, but there were no guards on it here. We could see clearly to the road; beyond that, trees closed off the river-bank.

No doubt Slim's mind worked on the problem as mine did. Two sentries in sight, and at least one radio operator inside the shack, perhaps two. No telling, in fact, just what we would find in there. It was no makeshift station, for it had been built by the Dutch; and it looked as if it might have two rooms inside. The front one was lighted up.

"Tell St. John to go back of the station on the double and follow the line of fence," I ordered, "down to the gate, and be ready to take out that gate sentry. Not to do it unless necessary, because more liberty parties may be coming back. We're liable to make noise at the radio shack, so if the sentry hears it, he'll have to be taken in. St. John can replace him, if he has to."

"Okay," said Slim. He knew that St. John, who was small and slim and had picked up quite a bit of the Jap lingo, might pass himself off for a Jap by night better than any other of us.

"Lefty can move up here and keep charge of the dogs and weapons. You and I move in on the radio sentry. Must be near midnight."

He was a guard rather than a sentry, of course, but I was not splitting hairs. Slim disappeared, and I kept my attention on things. I wanted badly to have a look in that lighted window of the radio shack, and resolved to head for it. We must make for the rear in any case, to work around and surprise the guard. That guard worried me. If he was on the alert, it would be out of the question for the Old Man's squad to hit the radio station as planned. . . . Just one of those things unforeseen, which might spoil the show. So we must gather him in.

Lefty came along. The three dogs received their orders and lay down, with him to watch them and the heavy stuff. St. John was already on his way. Slim and I took off across the open, aiming for the rear of the shack. We already had housemaid's knee from training-camp days, so there was no great trick to it.

We were perhaps halfway along and hugging the ground nicely, when we were aware of quick, sharp steps. The ground here was sand, and sand carries footsteps like nobody's business. Craning up to see, I described two figures coming up to the radio shack, and a bayonet glinted; on the road beyond, another glinted. Then voices rang out.

It was a relief of guards, also of the radio operator. This meant midnight. We knew already that guards were changed then, and were prepared for it. So we were not doing so badly, to have reached this stage with the night so well along, and no alarm.

THE door opened. One chap went in, the other came out and started away with the relieved guard.

"Konyawa! Konyawa!" sounded their voices, saying good night. The sentry at the gate was likewise relieved. Our scattered squads would no doubt be having their hands full, taking care of the relief guards.

Almost at once the light was dimmed in the radio shack. I plowed along once more, thinking of Cox and wondering how he was going to get started up the road. He must make up his mind to the delay, that was all. He would have enjoyed being in my shoes this night, with his yen for killing Japs; but no doubt he would be glutted for once, before much longer.

We inched along across that open space, and once safely around the corner of the shack got to our feet and relaxed. There was a rear window, and it was open. At a safe distance, Slim and I took a look inside. There was our operator at work; he wore headphones and thick glasses and had buck teeth. He was smoking a cigarette as he worked. This was obviously a rear room where all the apparatus was located, and except for a couple of shaded lights, it was dark. We drew away.

"Gimme the guard," breathed Slim at my ear.

I assented, and he disappeared, going clear around the shack. I worked back along this side. St. John must be somewhere close by on his way to the gate, but I could detect no sign of him.

Coming to the front, I waited and watched. The guard was pacing up and down with his rifle on his shoulder. I saw him do it a couple of times; then he did not come back at all. Instead, a shadow was coming along the front of the shack; that was Slim.

We got to the front window together, and looked in at a small room with a desk and several chairs. It was empty. There was a closed door, which obviously opened on the operating-room in the rear, where our operator was located. A shaded lamp stood on the desk, and this lit the front office. I had arranged with Lefty to come on when we opened the front door and slipped in.

For a moment we watched the approaches and made sure no one was coming; then I tried the door. It opened, and we went in. I shut the door carefully. Slim looked at me and jerked his thumb toward the inner door. I nodded. He went to it and rapped. A voice made some response. He rapped again.

"Kokoni o ide nasai!" he said. "Come on out here!"

We caught an impatient exclamation. Then the door swung open, and out stepped a little bucktooth, peering around through his thick spectacles.

We both got him at once, and there was no more to be said.

We took a look in the back room just to make sure no one else was around, and then lit cigarettes and relaxed. We left the light going, since its absence might occasion some remark. We had put the operator back at his instruments, too, in case anyone happened to glance in at the window.

Lefty Moore came along with the dogs, reported all clear, and dumped the weapons.

"We'd better leave the radio instruments alone," I said, "until the Old Man comes. We might want to make use of them before starting demolition. Well, it's nice to be able to talk for a change."

It was nice, but it was creepy. Here we were, smack in the middle of the whole Jap area, taking our ease, with death and destruction waiting all around us. It made Slim nervous.

"I'll go out and keep watch," he said. "You guys flop all you want."

There was a clock in the place; sure enough, it was past midnight. Lefty lit up, then gave me a look. His eyes were gray, and they sure looked queer in that blacked face of his.

"Well, Buck, come across," he said. "What did you mean by that crack back there?"

"What crack?" I asked, having forgotten all about it.

"You know: Butch."

That reminded me. "I supposed you'd know. Didn't you have a tussle with Butch, trying to hold him back? When we were lying out in front of that little group of trees."

"No," he said.

I took a deep breath. "Well, thank the Lord!"

"Come on, what's the answer?" demanded Lefty. "What's become of him?"

I was tongue-tied for a second. "Well, I guess it was Butch who knocked off our brandy."

"Yeah. I guessed that already, from his breath."

There was nothing else for it but to tell him, so I did. Since Lefty knew nothing of the matter, this left only one explanation—St. John. And oddly enough, I felt not the least bit of blame for the Navajo. Lefty heard me out, then nodded.

"I get it, Buck. I guess it's something we'd just better leave alone and keep to ourselves, huh?"

"If we don't talk, nobody else will," I assented, and that closed the sub-

ject. We knew all the answers, both of us.

After that, we looked over the dogs and had another smoke; neither of us felt like speaking. I was itching to know what had held the Old Man up. He and his squad should have been here long ago, by my figuring.

We had shut the door into the back room. All of a sudden Lefty came to his feet as though shot up on springs, and I followed. We caught a voice from that operating-room, and it sent a chill through me—because I knew that bucktoothed Jap had been dead as a doornail when Slim and I draped him at his instrument.

Chapter Seven

NEXT instant the door swung open, and there stood the Old Man. I knew him instantly by his figure and his heavy shoulders.

"You dod-blasted this and that!" he said softly. He was the maddest man you ever saw. "Me wasting all that work and time to get the bastard through the window! Lemme tell you what I think of you—"

It was nothing to laugh about. The Old Man had worked in from the back. Seeing the operator there, he had come in through the open window after noosing the Jap, and then had discovered he was too late.

"Served you right if we'd lobbed a couple grenades in here!" he finished up. "You, Buchanan! What are you gawking at?"

"You, sir," I replied. "Slim's on watch out in front—how'd you get here, Major?"

That tickled him. "Just walked on down the road and came up here from the back," he said. "So Slim's on watch outside, is he? Better get him here before he's knifed."

I opened the door, and Slim came in, one jump ahead of Litoff, who was in the Major's squad. With the door shut so we could speak, the Old Man got our report. It proved that he and his squad, hopeless of crossing here unseen, had just walked down the road past the docks, and not a soul had observed them. At the gate, close by here, they had found no sentry. This meant that St. John had seen and recognized them and had kept out of sight. He must have taken out the gate sentry. Cox had simply kept going toward Selat Itam.

"Good work," said the Old Man. "So far as I know, everything is going as it should. Your squad all on hand, Buck?"

"All but Butch Hartley, sir," I said. "Apparently he got separated from us."

"Replace him with Clive, who's outside," said he. I caught a glance from Slim, and knew what he was thinking. "Stand by till I get in touch with Cox. He didn't know you'd already made it here."

He got busy with the handy-talkie. I had a few words with Litoff. Apparently most of the sentries along the docks had been snapped up. As every man in the outfit was a demolition expert, this meant the time-bombs were being placed and the various squads getting ready to take their places around the central barracks building. I told Litoff about the officers' club. Just then Cox came in on the handy-talkie, and I could hear his voice.

"Yes sir. I'm a quarter-mile or more up the road, and have a prisoner I'm working on."

"Buchanan is here and ready."

"Fine, sir. Send him along. Tell him to bring the dogs."

Skinny Clive was waiting outside. The Old Man started out with us, then paused before opening the door.

"Buchanan, take further orders from Cox. Did he wise you up?"

"Yes sir."

That was all. We went out with the dogs. Clive joined us, and Litoff came along to take St. John's place at the gate. Everything was moving like clockwork now. No more creeping and crawling. We moved down to the gate, and picked up St. John.

I went ahead with Slim and Lefty and the dogs; Clive and St. John followed. I had the submachine-gun; the others had rifles. With Cox awaiting us up the road, all was probably clear and we could step out; just the same, we took no chances, but I went well in advance with Blitz.

Boy, but we had accomplished something! It was almost incredible to think that we had come clear through the Jap area and were heading upriver, with our men everywhere at work back there—and not a vestige of alarm! We might well feel proud of ourselves. If the Japanese machine-gun positions were occupied by us and our squads circled in around that barracks building, all hell was going to break loose—it would be the best Jap-killing that ever was! We were going to pull off the job, and no mistake!

We were downwind from Cox, so Blitz warned me well before we came up with him. We gathered around, Slim going on up the road to keep an alert and send back Glory with word if anyone was coming.

Cox was sitting on a mangrove root, and we didn't inquire into what he was doing. A shadowy object was beside him, and it was talking between groans. Cox spoke Japanese like a native. Whether or not his victim had been drinking, I do not know; but certainly the Nip showed no stoicism whatever and was talking freely.

"All okay, Buck?" said Cox. "That's fine. Now we'll proceed with the talk. How many *Kempei* are in the village?"

"Ten tens," croaked the Jap, meaning a hundred.

"Where are the white prisoners kept?"

The whites were not by themselves, it appeared. Dutch and Chinese and sepoys, the native soldiers trained by the Dutch, had been gathered here from the whole district around Mount Sedang and lodged in the Chinese part of the town, which had then been girded with barbed wire and guards, and turned into a concentration-camp.

Kempei headquarters was at the former Residence. The Dutch portion of Selat Itam was occupied by Japs almost entirely—traders, officials and so forth; it lay directly on the river. The concentration-camp lay farther back. Still farther upstream and out of our immediate picture, was the native village.

Cox went on with his questions. Yes, there was an American among the prisoners. He had been sick a long time. He lived with others in what had been the bazaar of Lim Toy. As Cox seemed to know where that was, he went ahead on the subject of the former Dutch *contrôleur*, Kronboom. Yes, he was somewhere in the camp. . . .

The voice of our informant had been weakening. Now it faded out completely, and Cox rose to his feet, a sinister black shadow in the starlight.

"Guess my technique was too harsh," he said softly. "However, I've got what we most needed to know, so let's go. . . . Buck, let's you and me go ahead, and we can send word back by your dog if we run into anything."

WE set off and soon caught up with Slim, who waited for the others. This meant Slim and Clive were going to be together; but I knew Clive—and he was not the man to start any dirty work that might get us all knocked off.

The road was empty. There was a bridge; there were a few godowns along the river front; but the native houses and Chinese compounds which Cox had described to me were all gone. Everything had been cleared away for military purposes, obviously, and the road had been widened; on our left were the river mangroves with their hideously reptilian roots, and on the other the blank jungle.

"Now we've got everything we need to know," Cox muttered to me as we paced along. "The Residency and former Dutch bungalows are on high ground over the river. This road goes straight past, on through the native village beyond, and on to the mountain. Remember the fork I spoke about? We turn off by that. The Chinese settlement, now the concentration-camp, lies back from the town."

"Then you'll try for Benson?" I asked.

"Of course. If we can make it before the fireworks start—if we only can! It won't be much of a concentration-camp, as such things go. Just everybody crowded in like animals, and barbed wire strung on posts around the flimsy Chinese huts and shops, with a few sentries. These *Kempei* police are older men, not much good as soldiers, or discharged veterans. Strike in at the back and reach Benson first chop—don't waste time."

"You know where to find him, I gather."

"Sure. Lim Toy's shop. Big bazaar. Chances are, Kronboom will be there too."

"Then you go in, and we'll see to the sentries."

"That's the ticket," he said crisply. "I have a wire-cutter."

We covered half the two miles of road without incident, dreading every instant lest we hear a rattle of shots from the oil area. Suddenly Blitz warned me and crouched low. We could see nothing at all; but I put ear to earth and could hear the *pad-padding* of feet. We drew back into the shadows at the roadside, and I gave Blitz my khaki handkerchief.

"Slim," I said. "Take it to Slim! Quick! *Slim!*"

BLITZ looked up the road, disappointed if ever a dog was, then whipped around and was gone on the back trail.

The sandy road, and Blitz, had given us plenty of warning. It seemed an age before several dark blotches came in sight—four men altogether, keeping the center of the road and talking loosely. Just before they came to where we were, I saw shadows move along the dark road-edge, and touched Cox's arm. Our squad was ready.

He stepped out at the four. I was with him; Skinny Clive and Lefty joined us. One squawk of sheer fright burst from those Japs, but there were no sentries to hear, so it did not matter. I never saw anyone move as fast as Cox. I think he killed three out of the four with his own hands.

We pulled the bodies into the shadows and went on again. Cox was moving faster now, and with good reason. I dropped back, told the others the plan, then caught up again with Cox. If he could reach Benson before the general alarm went off, our present task would be tremendously simplified.

Here a strange thing happened.

We were, remember, downwind from anything ahead of us, so that we could smell but could not be smelled. We came to a dip in the road, a dip so low that to our left the trees opened and the water came right up to the roadside. A native house had once stood here, but the Japs had cleared it away or burned it.

Blitz began to act strangely. He did not warn me of an enemy, but made noises in his throat and pulled back as though wanting to stop but also wanting to go on. I reached down and felt the hair on his neck standing straight up, and could feel in his throat the growls that he would not utter. Something was wrong, and he did not know what it was. No wonder; here was something outside all his experience and training.

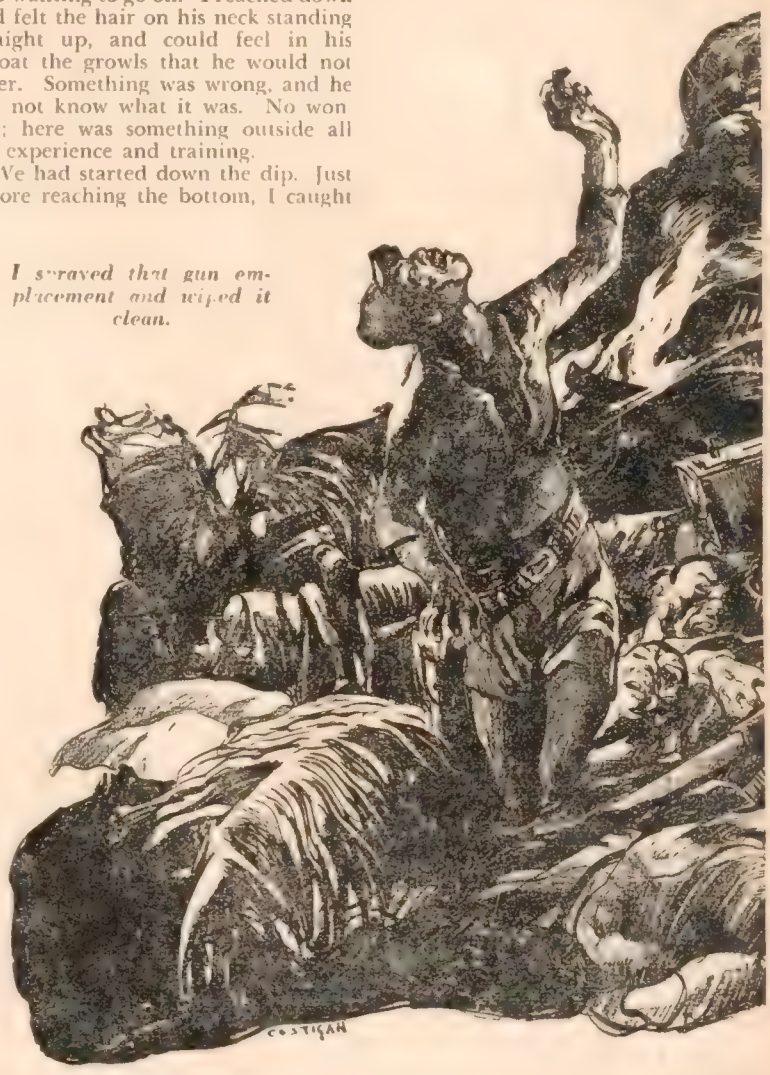
We had started down the dip. Just before reaching the bottom, I caught a glimpse of movement in the shadows on the left. They were deep, massive shadows. I heard a splash, and thought it was a mugger, for alligators abounded in the river. I caught Cox by the arm, and we halted. Luckily, I let go of Cox and grabbed Blitz before he could plunge ahead. It was no time for him to remember his training.

A queer grunting sound came in our very faces—a coughing grunt that made my spine curl. It was like nothing I knew. Then I saw the whole mass of shadows on our left begin to move. Behind us, the others had halted.

Again came the grunt. Then the shadowy bulk drifted out into the road and took shape not ten feet from us. It was solid reality, but in the starlight it looked like the pay-off of a bad conscience. It was a rhinoceros, pointing straight at us!

A big fellow, too; I could see his horn, and the lower tusks still dripping water. Everything I had heard about the beasts crowded into my brain. Their sight was bad, but their sense of smell made up for it. We were downwind; probably he was as surprised and startled and uncertain as we were.

I shoved the chopper forward, ready to fire from the hip. Cox put out a hand and checked me. Marine or no Marine, I admit that I had had no idea of facing that huge brute—he stood higher than we did—with only a knife. Cox had, and he was ready. Only one thing in life mattered to him—reaching Benson before any alarm was given.



I scraved that gun emplacement and wiped it clean.

I suppose the spell lasted only a few seconds, but while it did, it was unpleasant. If that enormous brute charged us, good night! Then, all of a sudden, the beast just seemed to melt sidewise toward the trees. I could hear Slim and Lefty, behind, cursing the dogs. Blitz, too, sensing that the enemy was in flight, wanted to go at him full tilt, and I had a job holding him back. By the time we all got our dogs under command once more, that rhino was probably a mile away. I was just as well satisfied, too.

We got going. And still no alarm from the rear.

It was safe enough to talk along here. Cox and I were well ahead once more, with Blitz sniffing the breeze. It was a caution how little things were working out for us, he said, like the native village being upstream from Selat Itam.

"In the old days fishermen had houses all along here, as I told you," he went on. "Now the Dyaks are all driven clean out of here. Lucky for us, too. Say, Buck! I'm worried."

"Things moving too smoothly?"

"Nope. That Jap I caught said something about troops being away on a practice march. I didn't pay any attention to it at the moment; wish now I had."

"I heard something about it. Three companies." I related what I'd heard.

"That may be the bad news for us," he said. "Those Jap troops go on tremendous hikes, forty or fifty miles in a day, to harden 'em. Suppose those three companies come back at the wrong moment?"

"Worry about that when it happens," I said. "If we jerk Benson out of there—"

"Listen, Buck; it won't be as easy as all that," he broke in, stalking along beside me like a black ghost. "We must get what he and Kronboom have got hidden away, savvy? And Lord knows where they cached their stuff when the Japs struck. Just snatching them out would be something, but we want the whole works. And," he added under his breath, but I caught the words, "what *I* want is to get my hands on some of that *Kempei* outfit."

I could guess why. I did not ask where his wife was buried, but I knew he was thinking about her. Maybe he did not know himself where her grave was, if she had one.

PRESENTLY we came to where a trail forked off to the right, and we waited here till the others came up. Then Cox gave the orders.

"No more talking from here on. This trail takes us where we're going, but we must branch off it farther on to work around the camp. Buck goes with me; you guys follow close. When I go in, spread out and grab any sentries who show up. Don't wait to wake up those Dutchmen in the camp either, poor devils!"

We went on. I was thinking of the prisoners in that camp ahead—about three hundred in all, the Jap had told Cox. Before long we could smell the place, too. Cox knew where he was by this time, and we got off the trail into rougher going, past bungalows and kampongs, until we reached some cultivated ground.

This camp had been the Chinese quarter of the Dutch town; the native village was a bit farther upstream.

The smell grew worse. First thing I knew, a black mass showed ahead and to our left; trees and concentration-camp, our objective. All around it had been cut a wide clear strip, bare of huts or trees or brush, and this was now a considerable help to us. Cox headed on interminably. We could hear children coughing and crying. I wondered if they were Dutch kids.

Then Blitz alerted, and at the warning I touched Cox.

We were pretty close to the wire. Just outside it, a sentry was pacing along humming a tune to himself. Cox melted away. The humming stopped with a gasp. And then nothing at all happened for a long while. Cox was scouting. He would not have gone into the camp without telling us. So we spread out, in case more sentries came along.

I wondered how long our marvelous luck was going to hold, in getting ahead with no alarm. Where we now were, silence was by no means imperative. From the native town beyond we could hear singing and the sound of drums; some native dance was going on. Half a dozen children seemed all squalling at once, and other voices blended with them, here in the concentration-camp. From one of the bungalows in the little town, now occupied by Japs, came the blaring of a radio giving a Jap program.

AS we waited, our dogs were fidgety, and pretty soon came the reason. Not from smell, but from some other dog-sense, the curs in the native village up beyond us must have divined the presence of our pups. Nothing else would explain the racket. One dog started it; others chimed in; and then they were all barking and howling worse than a pack of coyotes. If they moved to investigate, there was going to be a wholesale slaughter of Dyak curs!

Again we got our warnings as the dogs alerted. I reached out, thinking I had Slim's hand, but it was Skinny Clive who had come alongside. "You and St. John," I tapped, and the the two shadows left us. We were in the open outside the fence, remember. It was lucky I had sent two, because a few minutes later along came two Japs, talking together. They were discussing some Dyak girl, and it was the sort of talk one might expect from ringtails who kept the most obscene possible pin-ups around their quarters.

These two missed Cox, and never got a chance to miss anyone else. Skinny and St. John did beautiful work. Watching for them as I was, there was not a sign of them until they suddenly rose up out of nowhere, and the Jap talk ended in a gasp and a gurgle. Presently the two shadows came back openly to join us, and a little after them came Cox.

"I'm going in," he said quietly. "I'm located. Buck, you come along. The others spread out."

It seemed safe to talk here, but no one else spoke. I trailed after him with Blitz at heel, and we came to the wire. The village dogs were still keeping up their racket. I heard the faintly repeated *"spang-g!"* as Cox cut the top wires; there were no tinklers here. He stopped and came close to me.

"If I have any luck, I'll get 'em out," he said. "Hold on, now."

He went to work with his handy-talkie, calling the Old Man; he spoke under his breath, of course. He had forbidden any talking, but was talking himself. It did not make sense, for everything seemed safe. People in the concentration-camp were talking.

"Okay," said Cox to me at last. "Everything under control so far, back there. Wait here—I'll send 'em out."

He vanished. I waited, pulling the ears of Blitz.

Everything looked hunky-dory now. Here we were at the very heart of the real task, pulling it off neatly as pie, with never a sign of any alarm being given; and back there at the oil-field all objectives were being surely if not swiftly gained, and the squads getting their positions around the barracks ready to blast hell out of the whole Nip force. The whole thing was going off like clockwork. . . .

And suddenly the awfulness of it struck me full force: the thought that for these helpless people here in this camp there was no hope, no escape, no salvation. We must come and do our work and go, leaving them. We had no choice. Cox would send out three or four, and that was all.

Send them out—send them where? This thought jerked me alive. Leaving Blitz at ease, I quickly stepped out along the fence and ventured a word.

"Lefty!"

Presently Lefty Moore appeared, with the Great Dane stalking beside him. He put his mouth to my ear. He was breathing hard and excited.

"Hey. Those guys are raising bloody hell!"

"Who?"

"Slim and Clive. There on the right. I'm tellin' you, it looks like murder!"

"Go to the wire where it's cut, back of that shack, and wait for me."

He and Duke merged with the shadows. It was bad news he had brought. I hotfooted it along and located Clive and Slim. The two were lying flat alongside each other and cussing under their breath.

"Slim! I need you."

HE rose up. I took his arm and led him toward the left, Glory following. By the quivering of his arm-muscles, I knew that I had come along just in time. Another minute, he and Skinny Clive would have been at each other's throats.

"Look." I pointed left. "St. John's there, somewhere. Go on past him and keep Glory on the lookout. Those last two Japs came from that direction."

He patted my hand. "Thanks, Buck," he murmured, and went. He understood, all right.

When he and Glory had vanished, I went back to the fence and joined Lefty.

"What's it mean? They're both stark crazy!" he muttered.

"Okay now," I said. "We're passing out some guys from this prison pen.

Blitz had a bullet through his body. I squatted there, bawling just like a kid.

When the last one comes, he'll tell you. Lead them straight back in the brush here, clear around the oil wells, over to the beach, and up to our camp. They'll probably know the best way to go."

"Okay," he said.

I went back on the inside where Blitz waited, alongside the building.

That would be the safest disposition to make of Benson, Kronboom and the latter's two daughters. I figured no one else would be going with us. To go down the road to the oil-dumps would be to go directly into hell; this way, all would be safe.

It seemed an eternity that I waited there. Then I heard a woman crying, somewhere in the shacks near by. She was sobbing her very heart out, too. It was tough to listen to those great heaving sobs, and to know that she probably had plenty to cry about, and be helpless.

Then Blitz sniffed, hard, and rubbed against my leg. Someone, not an enemy, was at hand. I quieted him. A dark blotch was slipping down the side of the shack toward me.

"Buck!" It was a woman's voice uttering my name, and it gave me a jump. "Buck!"

"Here," I said, and stepped out of the shadow, and took her hand. It was a woman with a baby in her arms. An American woman? Sounded like it. I was astonished, but led her to where Lefty waited. Cox had told her my name, of course.

Pretty soon another blotch came along. This was a man. He had a stick and was limping badly, a small, slender figure.

"Okay," I said softly. He came up to me. He was tense, trembling.

"I'm Benson." He could hardly say anything, because he was crying. And all the while, the sobbing of that woman inside was keeping up; it got on my nerves. Benson caught hold of me.

"Where's my wife?" he asked.

"Come along. How many more?"

"No more. God bless you, God bless you—"

"Stow it!" I told him. Off to the left came noises that startled me—a scrimmage of some sort. Then the deep, savage kill-growl of a dog.

"Nobody else," Benson murmured. "Cox says to go."

I took him to his wife and Lefty. The three of them faded away into the starlight and were gone.

Chapter Eight

NO further sounds came from the wire on the left. I went back to my post.

Benson's wife and kid—why, of course. Cox had said he was in love with Kronboom's daughter. Probably had married her. But where was the other daughter? And where was Kronboom himself? And why in hell's name didn't Cox come?

I hugged the submachine-gun, quieted Blitz, and waited, on edge. Funny how the best of us make mistakes in a pinch. Things never happen in real life the way they do in books or in a movie, where a guy always hits the kingpin on the nose. I should have sent Slim away with Benson, instead of sending Lefty. That way, any chance of further trouble between Slim and Skinny Clive would have been stopped. No, we mighty seldom do the right thing on the spur of the moment. I could have kicked myself, and hard.

The woman's sobbing had ceased now. It was a blessed relief.

The Jap radio noise had ended also, quite a while back. Now the native dogs started another uproar of barking, and somewhere one of those "look-you-look" birds got going. A flight of flying-foxes, probably from the village taro or yam patches, swept overhead, chattering like mad.

Along the fence crept a shadow, and reached me. It was the Navajo, St. John.

"Slim got a guy, but he had a dog," said he. "Glory got the dog. Made a fuss."

"No harm done, apparently."

"Any news?"

"Stick around and see. Benson's out and gone."

He grunted. "Buck, this is great! I never dreamed we'd keep going so long without an alarm. These ringtails here will be looking for their sentries pretty quick."

I shushed him. Here was another shadow coming along the side of the building, and it was Cox. He was cussing a blue streak to himself, as he reached us.

"Benson gone?"

"Yes, and the family," I replied. "Where's Kronboom?"

Cox reverted to profanity, then choked it down.

"He won't go. Insists on staying with his own people. What we want is hidden at the Residence. He's going there with us to get it."

"Didn't he have two daughters?"

"One's dead. Good thing," said Cox. "These *Kempei* officials occupy the Residence—and you guys remember they're my meat. We'll all go there with Kronboom. He's gone to contact some of the sepoy officers. When the fireworks go off, they can bust out of here and everybody take to the jungle."

"If we meet Japs on the way to the Residence—"

"Give 'em everything we've got, and the hell with it!"

So Cox had pretty near reached the breaking-point too! I did not blame him.

He must have had a tough argument with Kronboom. I liked that Dutchman. . . . Refusing to skip to safety because his people must remain! We might have expected this, but Cox was almighty sore about it, or pretended to be. I imagine he respected Kronboom, the same as I did, for his refusal.

"There'll be sentries at the Residence," Cox said suddenly. "I know the place. I'll go ahead. You guys come along with Kronboom. Get him a rifle off one of those dead Japs."

He slid away, going to the left. St. John went to tell Skinny Clive. Knowing that Cox would wise up Slim in passing, I stayed with Blitz. Of course I knew why Cox wanted to go ahead of us. He had old accounts of his own to settle with those very Japs, especially the officers of the Residence. That had been Kronboom's house in the old days when he was in command of the district.

SO the sepoy officers were being told that the poor devils cooped up here were to be allowed to take to the jungle and hills! That was something. It made me feel better about going off and leaving them. The Dyaks or Malays, for there were both kinds around here, would no doubt be all for them, too. With our fleets battering Truk and the other Jap outer defenses, with the beginning of the end in sight, those poor refugees might still have a chance for their lives. One of these days Borneo would see our forces moving in to stay. . . . And the information supplied by Benson and Kronboom would considerably advance that day.

A dark figure came lumbering down past the shack toward me, heavy boots scraping. It was Kronboom, a huge bearded shape with long hanging arms, looking in the starlight not unlike some gigantic ape.

"Cox?" he rumbled at me.

"Gone ahead to the Residence," I replied. "The rest of us follow with you."

"Good. Come on," he said in his deep voice. I was glad he spoke English.

Skinny Clive joined us, and so did St. John, bringing a Jap pistol, which he gave to Kronboom. We turned left, following the Dutchman, and picked up Slim Cogswell a minute later, with Glory. Then we just trailed our guide.

Kronboom was in a hurry. He said nothing. He lumbered straight ahead and did not even try to keep quiet. Slim and I followed closely with the dogs, and in the rear came St. John and Skinny.

I was somewhat aghast when I saw that we were going straight through the town; our guide was turning out for nothing. Neat little bungalows, each with its garden and trees in a miniature kampong, showing what an orderly little Dutch settlement it had been; then around a corner and heading for the Residence on the high ground above the river. All the way, we did not see a soul. Very luckily, too. Kronboom would certainly have shot anyone he encountered.

HE led us straight to the steps of the Residence as though we were making an afternoon call. I grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"Quiet!" I said. "Understand?"

He gawked at me, muttered some sort of assent, and did try to be quiet. We went up the steps to the big house. There on the veranda steps, facing us, sat a Jap sentry with his rifle across his knees. He just sat. Cox had got there first, as the black pool of blood on the steps testified.

Kronboom went stamping into the place. I told Slim to wait outside here, left Blitz with him and Glory, and the rest of us followed in. Cox was there, muttering with the Dutchman, and located me.

"Buck? Watch the halls and stairs. Our job is here in the office. Quarters of the officers are all upstairs."

I stuck around, sending St. John and Skinny Clive back through the main hall. It was black as pitch in here.

Off the hall to the right was a large and ornate office. A match was struck, as I could see through the glass doors. Kronboom and Cox moved to the rear of the big room and worked at something. I heard a subdued crash of splintering wood. After a minute Cox came out to me.

"Okay. He's getting it, Buck. Everything's jake. Now for the Old Man."

He got to work with the handy-talkie. Inside, something else splintered. I could imagine Kronboom tearing the guts out of something with those long hands of his; probably there was a hidden panel in the woodwork. Then Cox got hold of Major Lang.

"Cox speaking, sir. Objective attained. We're at the Residence. . . . What?"

I could hear the thin squawk of the Old Man's voice:

"Stay there. I'm on my way now with a squad. The alarm's just been given. The lid's off. Meet me on the road in front of the Residence. Coming in a car to take you off. Set an incendiary bomb there and let her go. Good luck."

Note that the Old Man gave no reasons for coming; he knew that we had our hands full. Cox struggled free of the pack.

"No more use for that. What the hell—coming with a car! I've got an incendiary here. Clear the boys out, quick!"

I jumped to obey. We could hear voices and the *pad-pad* of feet upstairs. I sent Slim and St. John and Clive back down to the road below, and waited at the entrance. At this instant electric lights sprang on everywhere; someone had thrown a central switch. It was dazzling, blinding.

Cox and Kronboom came running at me together.

"Quick—outside, down the veranda, and down, *down!*" ripped out Cox. "Thirty seconds—"

We ducked along the veranda and dropped on our faces—and barely in time. There was a terrific roar. The whole side of the building where the office stood was blown out, and then replaced by a blast of flame as the magnesium took hold. But by some miracle the lights did not go off. The veranda and hall and rooms were all lit up.

We scrambled to our feet. Cox shoved something at me—a long cylinder of aluminum, a chart-case.

"This is it," he said. "Hang on to it. Get out of here. –Come on, Kronboom!"

He gave me a shove that knocked me clear off the veranda to the ground, submachine-gun, chart-case and all. Then he and Kronboom together darted back for the entrance, and into the hall.

Down the big stairs were pouring Japs, with a furious chattering of voices. That chattering became a shrill bedlam of outcries, and then it changed to a frantic screaming of fear and horror. The screams took on a new note—a shrill, vibrant note of agony and panic, drowned in the explosion of a grenade. Shots banged out. Two Japs in scanty night attire came reeling through the doorway. I got them both with a burst of the chopper.

Kronboom's gigantic figure came pounding out. He paid no attention whatever to us but raced down the veranda and was gone—back to the concentration-camp, no doubt. I waited till Cox showed up. He raced down the steps and joined me, with a fierce gasping laugh, and we made for the road below.

Cox had got his heart's desire there, all right.

It was high time he came, for that old sun-scorched wooden structure was spouting flame from every window; it took like a tinderbox, with a whoosh and a roar that drowned out the screams of the Japs.

"All right, I'll take it," sang out Cox, and grabbed the chart-case,

We pulled in among

much to my joy. To handle that and the submachine-gun was not easy.

I wondered briefly what was happening back at the oil-fields two miles down the road, but now everything else was swept out of my head. For as we gained the road, we saw a wild tangle of figures ahead and heard Jap yells. Everything was bright as day with that blazing pyre overhead. A dozen Jap soldiers, no doubt a patrol of some kind, had jumped our boys, and Cox went into it with the chart-case in one hand and his dripping knife in the other. Men and dogs were all mixed up in a yowling scramble.

THREE Japs slid out of the mess. They got clear and started to run, when my submachine-gun caught up with them. Just one little burst—I was careful not to be trigger-happy. Then something else came crawling at me; and by damn, I dropped the gun and dropped on my knees, and Blitz came into my arms.

mangrove roots and waded ashore. There was a thin screen of trees between river-bank and road.

He had a bullet smack through his body. I held him against me. He licked my face just once, before his head fell and he went limp. . . . I squatted there, bawing just like a kid and cursing myself for not having kept him with me. He was dead in my arms—my Blitz!

It hurt. It hurt worse than if he had been a man.

The dogs had saved our three men, as it proved, giving them warning at the last minute and jumping into the bunch of Japs—all three had been intent on what was going on at the Residence above. They had paid for that carelessness. Skinny Clive was dead; his feud with Slim was ended. St. John sat applying a first-aid bandage to a badly torn left arm, where a bayonet had ripped him.

There was a pistol-shot, then another. Cox was making sure of the wounded Japs. Slim came over to me, with Glory, and put a hand on my shoulder

"Aw, hell, Buck!" he said, while Glory sniffed at poor Blitz. "Aw, hell! Better pull out of it. Things are hot."

I SMEARED black into my eyes, smeared it out again, and stood up. *Hot* was the word! The Residence was a furnace, sparks and flame shooting a hundred feet into the air. The night was filled with screaming voices from the bungalows and camp and the native village up beyond, and it was the closest thing to hell I ever want to hear; the very stars seemed swamped in panic and terror.

"Skinny got it, Buck," said Slim, and I saw Cox and St. John coming to join us.

Just then came a roaring car tearing along, its headlights drowned by the ruddy glare of the fire. It was a Jap car, pretty well filled, with the Old Man at the wheel. He yelled at us.

"Pile in, pile in!"

We scrambled aboard. Somebody was shooting from the rear, at some Japs running across the road. I squeezed in beside the Old Man.

"Hell to pay," he sang out, as the car started forward. "There's another radio station up here—learned it from a Jap. Quarter-mile past the Residence. . . . Okay, Cox?"

"Okay, Major," said Cox. I was busy getting my chopper reloaded, and did not even get one last look back at Blitz. We were moving fast.

"Everything's on the move back yonder. Beautiful job!" said Major Lang. "Crow and Watts have things in hand. We blew the game getting this car—had to do it, had to reach this other damned radio. But everybody was in position. They're probably blasting the barracks by now, with the bazooka."

He jerked this out as the car lurched forward, and we all hung on for life: he was stepping on the gas, you bet. He wanted to get the job done here and get back. It was like the Old Man to take on this errand himself—it was

damned important that this other radio be wiped out quickly. We were away from all the fire-glare now, eating up the road.

"There we are," he sang out. The headlights picked up a white building just off the road, on the right, with a radio tower above. "Everybody out! Make a job of it."

He swung the car around. There were seven of us and Glory all jammed into the car besides Major Lang. Everybody streaked out. A screech went up from the little building, and a rifle cracked from a window. The answer to that was a couple of grenades. They exploded, and I felt somebody tugging at my arm. It was Major Lang.

"Buck! Quick—there to the left—across the road—"

I saw figures moving, and jerked up the chopper. I was about ten seconds late. A machine-gun was emplaced there, no doubt to command the river. It let go full blast, and sounded like the crack of doom. It was not forty feet away.

The submachine-gun, with its two hundred shots a minute, was enough. I let go with the full load and sprayed that gun emplacement and wiped it clean; but the damage had been done. None of us was hit—the Japs had fired at the car, raking its tires and blowing the hood and engine into a tangled mess. They must have used explosive bullets. I remember seeing the explosions and thinking they were incendiaries.

The Old Man was swearing mad. "We're afoot!" said he, and so we were. The men came piling out of the little station—Slim and Glory, St. John and three others, running over to where Cox and I stood with the Major. Demolition bombs were placed. We ducked for the trees and took to earth, and an instant later that radio station was blown to a heap of matchwood and wreckage, and the car knocked over on her side.

Our job was done—and so, apparently, were we, with the car useless.

Chapter Nine

MY first thought was to get the chopper reloaded. While I was doing this, everybody gathered around.

Cox was doing the talking.

"Look, Major! It's only about an hour to daylight. If we go back by road afoot, we'll find it buzzing with Japs here, and with Jap refugees from the oil-fields farther on. Some of us would get through; most of us wouldn't."

"Got an idea?"

"Let me and St. John go a few hundred yards up the road to the native village and get one of their canoes—craft big enough to carry us all. We'll drop down with it and pick you up here, then go down with the current till we strike our own crowd below."

"Good head!" said Major Lang promptly. "Go to it."

Glory came over and shoved his cold nose at me. Slim was at my side when I stood up.

"Major Lang," I said.

He turned. "Yes, Buchanan?"

"May I go back down the road to where we had our scrimmage? If it's impossible to get through, I'll come back. Just something I forgot."

"I thought you would, you damned fool!" muttered Slim. "Major, I'll go along if you'll permit."

"Gimme that chopper. We may need it here," said the Old Man. "And if you're not back when the canoe comes, we'll leave without you."

"Thank you, sir," I said, and handed him the gun.

It was a short quarter-mile back to the Residence. Slim left his rifle. The two of us set out at the double, with Glory trotting along. Slim told him to scout ahead, and he did so.

"Nobody's asking *you* to be a fool," I grunted.

"I was born that way," said Slim. "Boy, look what's happening down the river!"

By this time the Residence had ceased to spout flame. The dry tropical wood had burned swiftly and hotly, although fire enough still remained. The place was still a bedlam of voices, but the road looked clear ahead of us.

On beyond, however, the sky was alight over the oil-fields. It was too soon for the time-bombs to have exploded. This could only mean that the barracks and possibly some of the dock installations were afire, with our men pumping lead and flames into the enemy.

"Finest mass killing of Japs seen in a long while," panted Slim. "Sorry to miss it."

One thing that glow in the sky downriver did, was to draw off every police-force Jap and send them scampering in that direction. With the camp prisoners loose and Kronboom in killing mood, they were probably suffering heavily there also. We even sighted a few figures ahead, lit by the red glow from the Residence, and they were pelting down the road hot-foot toward the oil-fields. We let them go.

We reached the scene of the scrimmage at last.

I find it difficult to tell the truth here. It does make me out to be just about the damndest fool alive, and I admit the fact. But at the moment, I was savagely determined on it. Blitz and I had lived together, remember. We were more than just dog and man. The way he had crawled up to me, knowing he had got it, and given me that last swipe with his tongue, had hit me harder than anything.

"I'll watch," said Slim, who understood. "Glory! To heel."

I dropped beside the still form of Blitz; he was still warm. I lifted his head and—kick me if you like—kissed him once on his cold snout, then pried loose the tag fixed to his harness and shoved it into my pocket.

"So long, pooch," I said, and scrambled up. "Okay, Slim."

WE turned around and headed back, and ran like hell. All of a sudden it became mighty important that we should not miss that boat.

We met nobody. When we got back to the remains of the radio station, we found one of the Major's squad on guard, waiting for us.

"Old Man says to bring you along," he told us. "There's a dock down here beyond the machine-gun nest. And Buck, you certainly plastered those guys! Seven of them there, all nice and peaceful, lying around that gun. Come on."

He went ahead to show the way. I was rubbing at my waistband, which itched me.

"What's the matter?" asked Slim.

"I dunno. Poison ivy, maybe," I said.

He chuckled. "Nope. You got chiggers, feller."

"How you know?"

"Original wise guy, Buck. They work up, and when they get pinched, they dig in. You were curious why I was toting that nail polish, weren't you?"

"I don't get the connection," I said.

"You will when we get on that canoe. Put some of that stuff wherever you itch, and it seals the chigger in airtight. Kills him. Save yourself a lot of grief. I got enough for two."

We found a small but neat little dock pushing out over the mangrove roots, and all hands were there. While we waited, Slim and I did some stripping in the starlight, and applied that stuff of his, and let it dry. And I found, later on, that it did the trick.

A voice hailed us, and the long dark shape of a native boat crawled in from upstream. There was no object in keeping quiet. The native village was humming like a beehive, and over the town and concentration-camp swarmed all sorts of voices in a huge medley. Major Lang was interested in our report, and it was evident that we would not have got very far toward the oil-field by following that road afoot.

We piled aboard the boat, which was plenty big. St. John had a paddle, in spite of his wound, but somebody relieved him and we started to float down, keeping in close to shore. Out

in the center of the stream, we would have been far too visible. This promised to get us down very neatly and comfortably to where we wanted to go, but we did not move fast.

We might well congratulate ourselves. Any Japs who got away from the oil-fields would be crowding up the road; the police outfit from the town would be moving down it for the scene of action. As we floated, we could hear distant gunfire from downriver, enough to show that machine-guns were going it. Our machine-guns! Also, the *crump* of high explosive indicated that our 60-mm. mortar was on the job.

As we later learned, it was very much on the job. That big barracks proved to hold defenses we had not figured on—concealed machine-gun nests front and rear. Although the bazookas tore into it and set it afire, and the machine-guns and rifles and submachine-guns needled it with holes, those nests remained. Between the portable flame-thrower, which swept the ground with a tongue of fire for sixty yards, and the mortar which landed its high explosive with uncanny accuracy, the Nips got washed out pretty definitely. A good many snipers turned up, however, along the line of docks and the oil-tanks, and things were not altogether happy.

At the moment, of course, we knew nothing of what was doing down below. In fact, we had something more important on our minds.

"Holy smoke!" said somebody up forward. "Look there—across!"

Everything stopped with a jerk. Lights were springing up across the river, and large dark shapes appeared in the stream below us. Cox and Major Lang were close to me, and I heard them start profane comments.

"I was afraid of that," said Cox. "What were marked on the map as godowns across the river weren't godowns at all, but barracks. More troops there."

"And moving in, dammit," the Old Man added. "Cutting across ahead of us! Stop those paddles! Back up!"

"No paddles going," replied somebody. "We're not moving. Stuck, looks like."

Cox started another round of swearing. "Tide's going out, and we're on a mudbank," he said. "We'll have to jump over and push her off—"

"Hold everything," said the Old Man quickly, and we did.

We were safe enough for the moment, being in fairly close to the bank, but the situation was nothing to write home about. We had not yet got as far down as the Residence, whose glowing ruins established its position and also lit the water below us with a faint reddish light. Several barges were moving across from the other bank to ours, and more appeared to be loading for the crossing.

"We were too damned intent on this side the river to pay attention to the other side," Major Lang opined. "They've got men over there, naturally; probably gun-positions too. Well, we're cut off from floating down, that's sure. How far is it to shore?"

"About thirty foot," said someone.

"Better not try jumping over," spoke up Cox. "The mud is sticky. Muggers, too."

Nobody wanted to jump with crocs waiting in alongshore.

"Take it easy; we're not pushed," said the Old Man.

"This would be a nice time for those Japs out marching to show up," I said.

He turned around and snapped at me. "What's that? What Japs?"

Cox told him what we had picked up about three companies out on a practice march, and he said "Damn!" in all kinds of language.

"We might go at those barges and go through them—and catch hell all the way down the river," he said. "Doesn't sound good. With soldiers landing below us, the road sounds even less good. What equipment have we got? Pass the word."

THE eight of us had one chopper, one Reising, and five rifles; nothing to brag about when it came to fighting our way through an army. We could hear shots from off to the left beyond the town. That probably meant Kronboom had got hold of some weapons and was at work, or else the prisoners were being shot down.

"Cox, where in hell are your brains?" asked Major Lang.

"That's what I was wondering myself," Cox replied. "Tell you what: We might land right here and cut back through the town—bypass the road entirely and go through the brush to the oil-field position. It's bad brush and jungle, but could be done."

"Can you find your way?"

"By daylight, yes. In the dark—*probably*."

We were not shouting all this, understand. With those boats so close downstream, our talking was done very guardedly. With our boat stuck fast in the mud, we would be a sitting duck for any Nips who located us.

Major Lang was worried and getting more worried. Calculations had slipped up, as they were bound to do somewhere. With all our caution and scouting, any force of Nips across the river had never been guessed—that was supposed to be mangrove swamp and jungle over there. Added to this, the three companies out on hike gave us good cause for worry.

So did our own situation. It was up to the Old Man.

"All right. We can cut through any ordinary parties of the enemy," he decided, "so you've picked the best bet, Cox. The oars back water. Everybody else crowd aft."

The prow of our craft was well bedded in a mudbank. While we worked, more Japanese barges crept across the river below us. Of course, the big wind had not yet struck; when the time-bombs went off, that oil-field position was going to be one sea of flame from the docks back to the wells, and this would give the Nips something to think about.

Gradually we rocked the boat loose. Cox said we were in good position right here to land, as there was a wide street this side of the Residence which angled back through the little Dutch town, and since we had found the road practically deserted hereabouts, we should find the going clear.

So we pulled in among the mangrove roots and waded ashore. There was a thin screen of trees between river-bank and road. Slim and I got up the bank; and as we did, Glory gave excited warning. We did not pay much attention, but that dog had more sense than we had. I heard Slim choke back an oath.

"For God's sake, go easy!" he muttered, and passed back the word.

We crawled ahead and stopped. All of us were ashore. The road was in front of us, and we heard Jap voices snapping out orders; and there, in the glowing light from the Residence ruins, we saw a long file of Jap soldiers halted in the road.

We just stared and swallowed hard, and gradually the realization broke in upon us. These men were worn out; many of them had dropped in their tracks. They had obviously come down the road from upriver, and were halted here while their officers discovered what the commotion was about. They composed the three companies that had been off on a hike inland—the men were loaded down with full field equipment.

"Caught between the devil and the deep sea!" muttered Major Lang, at my side. "Well, stick it out. They'll march ahead before long."

A vain hope. Excited Japanese voices were chattering away like mad. The ruins up above us flickered, and shed new light as something caught and blazed up. Officers were rushing about. So were the *Kempei* or police, the Gestapo of the occupied regions, identified by their armbands. The officers were in a perfect fury and did not hesitate to kick the *Kempei* lads about, quite literally.

Their excited chatter was plain to our ears. A force of American raiders had landed and were attacking the oil-fields; some had come this far upriver, attacked the Residence and set

the prisoners loose. This looked as though Kronboom had done rather well at the job of getting his people away. We lay drinking it all in.

There was no high officer present, for the excellent reason that they were down at the oil-fields. So these company officers got their heads together and consulted. Meantime, the weary marchers sought amusement in their own fashion. They had fetched along some miserable natives who were roped together, men and women; whether Dyaks or Malays, I did not know. One of the soldiers went up to the huddled group and calmly thrust with his bayonet. A scream rang out. He broke into a laugh, and thrust again. His companions joined him.

With a good deal of laughter, they bayoneted all the prisoners on the spot, and the officers paid no attention whatever to the screams. It had probably been decided to get rid of the prisoners. At all events, orders rang out, and the column began to march on down the road.

My hands were itching for the submachine-gun, and the Old Man shoved it at me.

"A nice mark, huh?" he muttered. "But save it. We want to get away with a whole skin. Look at the sky."

Sure enough, dawn was coming up.

Captain Crow, in command at the oil-fields, had orders to withdraw and make for our shore position among the rocks, in case of any attack in force, because our gang there would not be in position to hold against such an attack once the flames began to spout. Evidently the attack was on.

So the unavoidable delay at this point had faced us with a new problem. Crow would withdraw as ordered when his column attacked him, regardless of the Old Man and us. Thus we could not hope to make a junction there with our main force. Instead, we must now hit straight through the town, past the concentration-camp, and off into the brush, circling the oil-fields and making for our seacoast position. I could hear Major Lang and Cox discussing it.

"All right, Buchanan," said the Old Man, turning to me. "You and Slim lead off. Use your own judgment when to get going. Straight through the town. Cox will guide you."

I crawled up beside Slim and Glory. The last of the troops were filing past us. Slim turned his head to me.

"How's the nail polish working?" he asked under his breath. I grunted for answer. It was the last word I ever exchanged with Slim.

Though this story has the vividness of reality, it is of course entirely fiction and does not describe real people or events. The conclusion will appear in our next issue.

What Do You Think?

A Readers' Forum

First We Must Have *Men*

FOR the men who are now in military service, there is already much postwar planning. That is well and good. We know more about guidance than we did twenty-five years ago, and we should not make so many mistakes.

I am a left-over from World War One, but not too old to remember what followed our discharge. The Government provided for the education and rehabilitation of those who had been disabled as a result of the war. There was no system, no planning to what was done. Some men with an eighth-grade education wanted special training in medicine or in engineering. Others wanted a business course. The old Veterans Bureau did everything to please us, but in their efforts they often failed.

We men came back knowing all the answers. We knew exactly how education should be changed. Luckily for us and for the country, those in power were courteous enough in listening to us, but not rash enough to revolutionize education as we seemed to prefer.

Men in this war will come back knowing all the answers. A man doesn't make fifty bombing missions and then forget the experience. He is going to have a vivid picture of what he felt and experienced. That will be ever present in his mind. Naturally it is going to shape his thinking. He is going to think in terms of vocational, technical and military training. He is going to want all men and women trained in those fields.

In kindness and protection to those men, for the sake of our future, we must not make of our schools and colleges factories and vocational shops. We still must train good citizens. We still must have thinkers. There is a place for the liberal arts studies, a place for the humanities. First we must have *men;* then engineers and aviators. First we must have *men;* then lawyers, doctors, and professors.

We shall need an education which will provide for the artist, the poet, and the musician. A people without a culture becomes brutal, destructive. Germany burned her books in 1933, and in ten years we have the result. When she removed her libraries it was easy to close her churches, and send her ministers to concentration-camps. When she burned her books, it was easy to force her writers and thinkers either to sell out or to leave the country.

We shall need to take a long view in planning for the continued education of our men and women who have been willing to give their lives for a way of life that is American.

Panken Holt.

Nothing on a Silver Platter

I AM familiar with the Articles of War. I know that it is a serious offense to speak disrespectfully of a member of the Congress of the United States while one is in the armed forces. That will explain if this letter seems somewhat restrained.

But I speak, I am sure, for a vast majority of those who are serving the flag when I say why can't Congress get over the idea that we are a bunch of mercenaries who must "be taken care of" with bonuses and pensions? For those of us who will not return, of course, it will be the duty and responsibility of the Government to see that our dependents do not suffer as a result of our sacrifice. And for those of us who come out of the struggle permanently disabled, there must be provision made. But seriously to consider legislation which would pay us all amounts ranging up to $4,500.00, as has been proposed in Congress, is an insult to our dignity, an injury to our pride and a direct blow to our morale. We are not beggars; nor are we soldiers-of-fortune. We are serving our country because it is our duty to do so. We are being paid a reasonable wage for doing so. We are well aware that even that wage must be paid back at the end of the war, in taxes.

We hope to get more out of this war than a chance to raid the Treasury of the United States. We hope to come back to a better, more tolerant, more progressive America. We don't want a "new" America; we only ask a better version of the old one. We want nothing handed us on a silver platter. We ask only the opportunity to work out our own salvation and the salvation of the country with a maximum of opportunity and a minimum of interference from Government or private organizations. We feel that in-

discriminate granting of bonuses and pensions at this time, or at any time, is against the best interests of the country and can but tend to undo much of what we hope to gain by our sacrifices.

It is very well for a group of flag-waving organizations, aided by vote-seeking politicians, to propose all sorts of preposterous schemes for the "benefit" of the poor fighting man. We remember with disgust the hue and cry raised by these same veterans in their attempts to fill their own pockets after the last war. We don't propose to make any such disgraceful spectacle of ourselves.

The Congressman who has the real interests of his country at heart will do all in his power to defeat such schemes. And if we, the service men, have anything to say about it, any speaker rising on the floor of Congress to propose such a measure will be hooted down in scorn.

(Cpl.) Alfred A. Whitt,
U. S. Army Air Forces.

Thoughts in the Navy

THE transition from civilian life to Navy life is sudden, abrupt and brings with it a flood of new and surprising experiences. As a boot I was so busy learning Navy routine and in untangling myself, so to speak, from civilian knots that I didn't have time to think. I stumbled through my strange duties, and slowly but gradually became adapted to my new environment and duty, which at first appeared to be a bewildering maze of endless detail.

Deep from the fibers of my inner being I felt my thought processes begin to awaken and pulsate, faintly at first but increasing in strength with each passing moment.

During the day in a brief moment of leisure, or during the night as I relax in my hammock, after sending a prayer on high, a strong emotion flashes from me unerringly, and with the speed of lightning, to the one place I had been thinking about (consciously or unconsciously)—*home.*

From this moment on, the barriers are let down and as a quiet spring that has suddenly become impatient of its own serenity rises and surges forward, my thoughts race forth and review in quick succession the many incidents of my childhood, my schooldays and my family life. I wonder when I will return to the familiar scenes of my boyhood. I speculate on my future in the Navy, conscious that I am on the threshold of a struggle for life itself. Frightened? Yes, but as I gaze around at my shipmates, I realize that they too must be experiencing the same thoughts and emotions. The results of their Navy training are reflected in their actions and in their faces. Now no longer frightened, I feel secure because Navy men know their jobs and are aware of the responsibility of doing their duty to the very best of their ability.

It is then that the intangible feeling we call thought transcends into a positive conviction that my shipmates and I are on a straight course to victory and to—*home.*

Nicholas Cardone, S2c,
Ward 118.

Our High Schools' Share

BEFORE entering the service I was an industrial education instructor. For several years I had argued that our system of education was in a rut and was controlled by a group of old fogies who were afraid to see any revision, for fear of losing their jobs. I was one of the many who preached the theory that algebra, geometry, and trigonometry were a waste of the student's time.

After more than three years as an officer training recruits for combat, I have reversed my opinions. Where I once ridiculed an educational system as old-fashioned, I now thank God that someone was old-fashioned enough to keep boys and girls studying the old arts and sciences. We do not know what results a new system might have produced in an emergency: but we do know that our high-school system has saved our country.

When war was declared thousands of officers, specialists, and technicians were needed. In most branches of the service to hold these jobs a good foundation in mathematics is essential. The youngsters who got a smattering of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry in high school were chosen for the jobs because college men were far too few to supply the need. They became the navigators for the air service; computors, survey men and fire-control operators in artillery, and gunners and other specialists in the Navy and Marines. The boy who knew his math almost invariably had a key position with a good rating waiting for him.

Had it not been for these several million high-school boys, trained in what some of us once thought an outmoded system, development of successful operations in our mechanized and specialized forces would have been delayed for years.

When the war is over, there will likely be a movement to revise our educational system along more modern lines. This can be profitably done in many ways, but we should remember that our present system has saved our country when the future was dark and we should hesitate before adopting any untried methods.

Capt. M. R.,
Temple, Texas.

BLUE BOOK is glad to receive letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the Armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. The author's full name and address must accompany the letters; but, if he prefers, initials only may be used for publication. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do *You* Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

From a 1A Father

MY card came today. I have been re-classified 1A. It seems they are getting around to us older fellows now. I am in my late thirties, married, the father of two children and in what can be called an "essential" industry. The question of the moment is shall I or shall I not seek a deferment.

I have decided not to do so, because I honestly believe there are few men so necessary that they cannot be replaced. I have decided that I do not have the right to expect seventeen-year-old boys to do my fighting while I stay at home in a safe job. Added to that, I do not like the whole deferment system. It places an unfair advantage in the hands of the employer who can say, "Do just as I tell you, and if you quit—into the Army you go." . . . I am willing to fight as a patriotic duty. I do not want the Army held over me as a threat.

Going to war will not be the adventure I would have considered it fifteen years ago. I'll worry about the kids. I'll remember the times they were sick, when my wife and I took turns watching by their beds. It may seem silly, but I'll worry about the furnace. My wife can handle a budget but she can't make a fire burn properly. Most of all, I'll worry about her. She takes such wonderful care of the children and is so careless of her own health.

Nevertheless, the Army needs more men. Some of us will have to go. We have sent our kids to the battlefields. . . . They have gone cheerfully, knowing that their lives might end before they have had a chance to live. I, who have known years of happiness and contentment, should be and am willing to fight for my country and the good life I have enjoyed in it.

A. P. T.

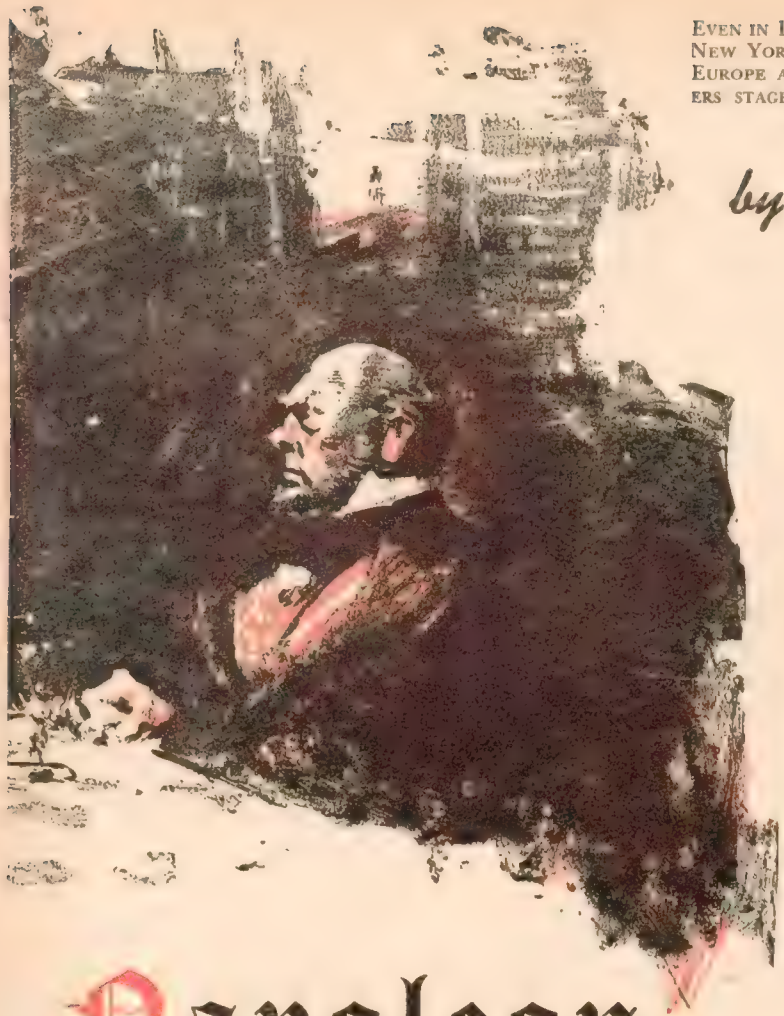
A Bottle of

IT was a raw day for April. The wind drove its surly whitecaps across the bay to pound the Jersey shore, and the dinghy wallowed doggedly through the rollers, cold spray drenching Matthew's back and the water deepening about his feet. His palms burned with dragging on the oars, but inside he was warm: He was abreast of Fletcher's boat, and far ahead of all the other newsboats struggling to reach the *Jamaica*. Whatever tidings the brig brought from Europe would be read in the *Standard* today.

Fletcher's men, four bluish-jawed hooligans from the Bowery, roared impotently at him as he went by. They were bad men to meet after dark in Paradise Square, but this was Matthew's element; and whisky and carousing did not make for good rowing. Matthew had cut their head start to nothing; and now, only a hundred feet from the *Jamaica*, his little clinker-built boat was out in the lead. A few of the other boats were still back there struggling through the gray rollers, but Fletcher's men knew it was all over, and lay exhausted on their oars.

There was always a satisfaction in beating Adam Fletcher, who had turned what had been rivalry into bloody war. Matthew thought that 1833 would go down as the black year in newspaper history. A *Guardian* man had been killed last week in a brawl between rival papers. Two shops printing small journals had been set afire a month ago. It was no longer a race when a ship from Europe anchored: it was a fight to get to your boat, and then it was a scramble to keep from being struck by a rock or an oar. Any ship that dropped anchor might bring word of war with France; and every editor in New York meant to be the first to print it. It was a time of news-hunger, with only month-old news for food.

Matthew brought the dinghy alongside the brig, and a line was dropped. He made the boat fast and scrambled up the rope ladder. For a moment he stood on the deck, getting his breath,



EVEN IN 1830 THERE WAS FIERCE RIVALRY BETWEEN NEW YORK NEWSPAPERS; AND WHEN A SHIP FROM EUROPE APPEARED ON THE HORIZON, THE REPORTERS STAGED RACES AND STRATAGEMS TO GET THE NEWS FROM OVERSEAS FIRST.

by Frank Bonham

Napoleon

and in his mind he rehearsed the signals he was to flash to Mr. Dowd: *Right if it's peace—left if it's war.* He could just discern Mr. Dowd's white beard on the dock.

Up forward, Matthew saw the master, a great-shouldered, gray-headed man, leaning over the starboard rail to say a parting word to the pilot. They were familiar shoulders, and it was a familiar head; and surely he couldn't be wrong about the voice. It was a voice to intimidate a hurricane, a voice that was all pedal notes. When he turned and saw Matthew, there was no doubt about it.

The Captain called, "Matthew, lad!" and came up the deck, a square-set man with black eyes and a gray-black beard, a leather cap set forward on his head. Jeremiah Ballantine gripped Matthew's hand, and with his free hand struck him on the shoulder. "Now, how'd you know I was master of the *Jamaica*?"

"I didn't, Uncle," Matthew said. "I meet a lot of boats. You were still on the *North Star* when I saw you last." He stood there smiling, feeling an ache where his uncle had struck him, and thinking that he never got any older or less hearty.

"Ah, they sold her out from under me," Ballantine said. "I've got my own boat now, with of course a bit owing to the underwriters. Then I suppose you've quit Campbell's?"

Matthew shook his head. "I'm still buying, tasting and dreaming of wine. But I've managed to keep on with Mr. Dowd, somehow, working Sundays and odd hours. Circulation," he added with some pride, "is up to fifteen hundred."

"That's fine, now," said his uncle. "Maybe I've got a bit o' news for you. But first we'll go up to my cabin and have a smile."

"If you please, Uncle—Mr. Dowd's waiting on the dock. I'm supposed to signal him the big news, and that's this: 'Is France going to pay her indemnities, or is she going to fight? I guess you know what Jackson told her: 'Pay up or fight!' "

"That's a question for a bigger man than me," Ballantine said. "I can tell you this much: Livingston's *chargé d'affaires* sailed from Le Havre two weeks before I did. His ship will be dropping anchor any day. He's the man will tell us whether France intends to pay up."

Matthew said, "Then I'll meet you in the cabin," and hurried forward to flash the news to Mr. Dowd.

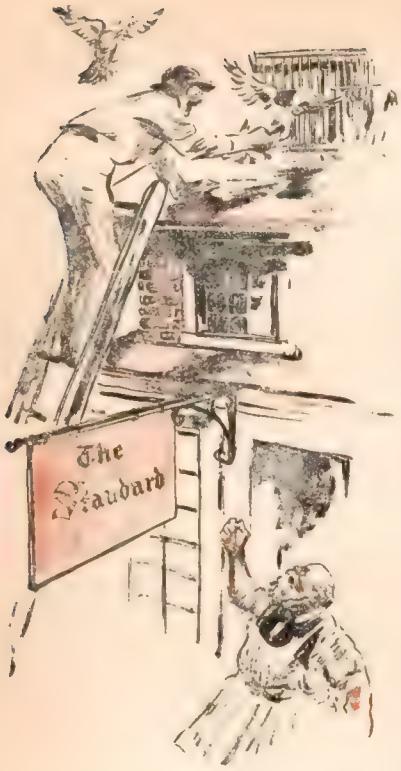
BALLANTINE unlocked his sea-chest and produced a straw-shrouded bottle. While he drew the cork he smiled at Matthew. "And how is it with you and your young lady?"

"How could it be, but badly?" Matthew said, and he looked out the port at the gently rolling skyline of masts and buildings. "It's in the old gentleman's manner that I'm only a poor relation. Never," he advised solemnly, "fall in love out of your class."

Ballantine thumped thick tumblers on the table. "Shame on you for talking of class! This is America, where one man's as good as the next. Besides, these things all work out in time. Now, then, suppose you roll a drop of this brandy around your tongue, and tell me whether you'd keep it, or give it to the lads in the fo'c'stle. A case of it was given to me by a very good friend of mine in San Juan."

Matthew sniffed of the liquor and then glanced sharply at his uncle. He took a bit on his tongue and let his taste-buds glory in the delightful mellowness of the brandy. He drank it down. It was not like Campbell's American brandies, which fought with a man, and when they went down left him seared and shaken.

"Uncle Jeremiah," he said, "you are a practiced liar, but not a good one. That brandy never saw San Juan. It



was born in France. Probably near Laon."

Ballantine, pouring another round, smiled. "Very good. And for whom shall we say it was bottled?"

Matthew looked with sudden respect at the bottle. He leaned across the table to remove the straw sheath, and then he slowly sat back. Matthew Holland remembered what his mother had told him of her brother, who was always on the wild side, always off at sea or into some muss, and whom she prayed God every night to keep from the gallows.

"Uncle," he said, "did you come by that bottle honestly?"

JEREMIAH BALLANTINE chuckled; eyes bright, as though recalling an hour of high adventure. "Honestly enough," he said. "Napoleon brandy, Matt. Nineteen cases of it! Do you suppose you could sell it for me—quick and quiet?"

Matthew looked at his glass. With his whole heart he wished Fletcher's men had beaten him. He had a great liking for Jeremiah Ballantine, who was all the family he had, and he had no wish to hurt him. But he was no privateer's agent.

Ballantine saw his hesitation. "It's duty-paid," he said. "Nothing below decks—except, maybe, how I acquired it."

Matthew leaned toward him. He was a tall young man of loose-coupled make, with dark hair and a generous mouth. The brandy was warm and friendly in him, and it was beginning to heat his blood pleasantly. "And how did you acquire it, Uncle?"

Ballantine smiled. "This'll give you a stick or two for your journal, Matt. But mind—no names! Except, perhaps, that of the French sloop, *Oiseau Bleu*, which was quietly relieved of nineteen cases of brandy one night in San Juan, while her crew was fighting in town with the crew of the American brig *Jamaica*—whom we will not mention. And it's a funny thing, lad, but the outfit that had shipped the liquor was the same firm that appropriated my ship in '15, with the help of that good man Bonaparte!"

In his relief, Matthew laughed. "Good for you, Uncle!" There would be a laugh for all Americans in the way one Yankee sea-captain had reimbursed himself at the expense of his enemies. All over the country they were waiting to hear what France intended to do about men like his uncle, who had lost property in France during the war years. President Jackson had told her plainly enough what he expected: Pay up or fight!

"The way I see it," Ballantine said, "if they pay me, I pay them. If not, I've got back what the stuff will bring, though not a patch on what I lost."

"I'll get you a good price," Matthew said, standing. "And from old Campbell himself, bless his Scot's heart. You'll be at the China Inn, as usual?"

Ballantine winked. "Toasting my toes in the kitchen while I chaff the maids!" he chuckled. . . .

Matthew reached the shop in time to insert the story before Mr. Dowd locked up the chases. The newsboys began to arrive at four. When they had all been sent away with their arms full, Matthew went to his room on Water Street and changed to dry clothes. Dinner with the Campbells was a clean-shirt occasion, though not always a happy one.

He studied his reflection in the triangular sliver of mirror, but without vanity. In the tall beaver hat with its bald patches, and the threadbare box coat, there was nothing to stir his pride. His mouth, he thought, was too wide, and the eyes were somehow hungry. A Chatham Square merchant would have considered him a good catch for his daughter. But he was not a good catch for the daughter of the city's largest wine merchant. Matthew knew it, and Campbell knew it, and so there was always a stiffness at their dinners.

At eight he was admitted to the red brick house on Stuyvesant Street. The servant left him in the parlor, and presently Anne entered. She stood in the door with the curtains setting off her low-cut gown and dark hair, and Matthew thought that she was like one of the portraits in the drawing-room—calm, lovely and unattainable. She came across the room, her skirts rustling and just the toes of her white slippers showing. Matthew took her hands, feeling his love warm in him like Uncle Jeremiah's brandy.

"Father will be down in a few minutes," Anne said. Matthew quickly took her into his arms. Afterward they sat before the white marble fireplace, her head on his shoulder. Anne said: "I wish this were our fireplace, in our own house."

"I wish," Matthew said, "that I didn't feel like a servant in this house."

ANNE squeezed his hand. "Father makes everyone feel a servant until one sees through his snapping and growling. Why do you think he asks you?"

Matthew said: "Policy. Keep a man happy, and he'll work for less."

"It's more than policy tonight," Anne said. "Do you know, I saw him twice today smiling to himself! And once I overheard him say: 'No water in the wine tonight, Jonathan.' That hasn't happened since the British consul came to dinner."

Matthew watched the fire. "If his big news will give me more free time, I'll like it."

Anne looked at him, troubled that she could not lift his black mood. She said softly: "I wonder what you'd do if it ever came to a choice between me and the paper—"

Matthew heard James Campbell descending the stairs, and he stood up. He said: "I don't know, Anne. I hope it never comes to a choice."

Dinner was served in the small sitting-room overlooking the park that sloped to the East River. There was a snapping fire on the grate; outside, gleamed the riding-lights of the ships.

James Campbell said a long grace, his bald head catching the shine of

the candles. He was a small, tight-lipped Scot, given to stand-up collars and green velvet jackets, a man as chary of his emotions as he was of his dollars. Tonight he was in surprisingly good humor. Over the fish he remarked:

"Mr. Hazlitt has spoken highly of you lately, Matthew. He feels that if he ever leaves us, I could not find a better senior buyer than you."

Matthew thought happily: *A raise it is, then.* He said: "That's very kind of Mr. Hazlitt, sir. He is a pleasant man to work with."

Mr. Campbell said: "Mr. Hazlitt can be very difficult. However, I am inclined to disagree with him on this point."

Matthew was puzzled. Campbell sipped his wine, touched his lips with his napkin. "In fact," he said, "I have something much better picked out for you. Next summer I plan to open a new office in Boston. I should like you to manage it for me."

Anne said: "Father!" She was as excited as a small girl, her cheeks all rosy, and even James Campbell permitted himself a smile. But Matthew's heart was black. How could Anne think this was wonderful news, when it meant the end of Mr. Dowd and the *Standard*? Her eyes were saying: "It's our chance, Matthew!"

Their chance, and not an accident. It was merely James Campbell's way of trying to bring him up to his daughter's social level, if he was what she wanted. Matthew said:

"I don't know what to say, sir—"

Mr. Campbell shrugged. "Don't say anything. You've earned it."

He had earned it, Matthew thought—by falling in love with a girl who was above him and a trade that would not support him. He thought: *A man ought not to be in love with two things. It pulls him apart.*

"If I refuse, sir?" Matthew said. "You see, Mr. Dowd is getting old; he depends on me. I don't know—"

CAMPBELL's lips shut in a thin line. "I take this unkindly, Matthew. I have overlooked older heads than you in the firm because I thought you were sincerely in love with my daughter. Young people in love should not wait too long. And you refuse such an opportunity for the sake of a limping penny journal!"

"I am not refusing, sir," said Matthew miserably. "I am only asking for time to think it over."

The meat course was before them, and James Campbell poured burgundy with a steady hand, though his face was red. "We will not discuss it," he said. "You will either go to Boston Saturday week, or leave my employ."

Matthew met his eyes, his jaw stubborn. He said, slowly: "Yes sir. Either I go to Boston, or I leave Campbell's."

He did not look at Anne. He tasted the wine. Recalling his promise to Jeremiah Ballantine, he said: "By the way, would you be interested in nineteen cases of Napoleon brandy at a fair price? Mr. Wickley tells me we are sold out."

Mr. Campbell's expression seemed strange. "An odd number," he said. "Who is selling it?"

"The party asked not to be mentioned. It seems that some sea-captain had an encounter with a French boat, the *Oiseau Bleu*. It's in the *Standard* tonight. He came out of the fracas with the brandy. I can buy it for perhaps—"

Mr. Campbell's glass came down hard, spilling burgundy onto the linen. He was pale. "Matthew," he said, "are you a complete idiot? That was *our* brandy! It was to arrive next week on the *Oiseau Blue!*"

Matthew sat motionless, nailed to the chair by Campbell's eyes. He said: "I had no idea, sir! Mr. Hazlitt said nothing about buying it."

"Sometimes," Mr. Campbell said, "we feel justified in making a purchase without consulting the junior buyer. It happens we had to pay fifty per cent down to get it." He blinked twice, rapidly: "I want the scoundrel's name, Matthew. I'll see that he gets his proper reward."

Matthew said: "I can't tell you that, sir. My informants expect me to protect their names."

James Campbell arose. He said: "Then you may consider my house and my office locked to you. Mr. Wickley will take over your desk in the morning."

Matthew looked at Anne. She was white; the tears had not come yet, but they would come. He stood up.

"Mr. Campbell," he said, "I do not want to walk out of this house and know I cannot come back. But I am under an obligation, even if I am only a reporter on a limping penny journal."

Matthew left the house. He was as good as destitute, and it was not well with his heart. His emotions were too confused to bear cataloguing.

AS he turned the corner into William Street, he saw a crowd in the dark street before Mr. Dowd's shop. Matthew forced his way inside and went down three steps to the floor, and standing with his hat askew he looked at Mr. Dowd, and at Adam Fletcher and the two leatherheads who had the printer in their official clutch.

Matthew stared at Fletcher. He said: "Is this your party, Fletcher?"

Fletcher was a tall and spare man with a long face that always reminded Matthew of a satyr's, with its hollow cheeks and chin whiskers. He was a scheming sort with no thought of scruple. News was his god, and a printing press his altar.

"I'll ask the questions, laddy," he said. He held his plug hat against his chest and his fingers rapidly drummed upon the crown. "These gentlemen and I want to know how you came by that piracy story. Dowd says he knows nothing about it."

"Large bark, small bite," said Matthew. "How does it concern any of you?"

One of the policemen pointed his stick at him. "Piracy always concerns us, young fellow. The *Oiseau Bleu* docked tonight. Mr. Fletcher was kind enough to show your little article to the master. If you aint ready to point the man out, we can put you up in the watch-house for as long as you want."

Mr. Dowd was watching Matthew with concern. He was an old man, prone to befuddlement when excited; Matthew guessed it was confusion as much as caution that led him to deny knowledge of the story, but at any rate he was glad he had not mentioned the *Jamaica*. Hymns were Mr. Dowd's rampart against the world: Give him a little time and a corner by himself, and he could sing his way out of any predicament. But as he looked at Matthew his blue eyes were bewildered behind his square spectacles.

"Don't tell them if you have promised not to," he said. "Never betray an informant. You should print that under your masthead, Fletcher. It would be the only worthwhile statement you've ever printed."

"They can't jail a man for somebody else's crime," Matthew said.

"Obstructing justice is a crime," said Adam Fletcher. He took a lusty pinch of snuff into his head, spilling brown grains on his beard. "You'd like to keep on writing for Mr. Dowd's little pamphlet, wouldn't you? So why not help us find him?"

Matthew grinned. "So you can print it in the *Ledger*? When I'm ready to say anything, it will be in the *Standard*."

Fletcher snapped the snuff-box shut. He said to the leatherheads: "Does that make your duty clear?"

It was in Matthew's mind to resist, but the policemen were burly and armed with clubs, and he would only add a headache to his worries. As they led him to the door Mr. Dowd said firmly: "Suffer it to be so for the present, Matthew. I shall ask God to show us the way."

Adam Fletcher accompanied them to the police station on Chatham Square. The desk-sergeant said, "Fifty dollars' bail, my man," and wrote Matthew's name in a large ledger. Fletcher drew Matthew aside.

"This is all very painful to me," he said. "I judge you one of the spryest young men in the city when it comes to bringing home the news. Now, then,"—winking,—"I know a few of the powers in your ward—you understand? Of course, I couldn't do it for just anyone. But if you were one of my own men—if you were willing to quit Dowd and come to work on the *Ledger*—"

He smiled, and Matthew put a glorious period to that black day by driving his fist into the middle of Fletcher's face. Fletcher went back two steps and sat down.

"There's an editorial for you," Matthew said: "Tell your readers how the poor man's Messiah was attacked by a mad reporter. But don't tell them how you'll silence a story about a bribe-hungry alderman for a hundred dollars, or how many Bowery hooligans are on your pay-roll. They'd lose faith in the press, Fletcher, and then you couldn't give your papers away!"

Fletcher began to swear; Matthew went off contentedly with the turnkey.

He slept that night. In the morning he sat on his straw tick in the corner of the large room and looked at his fellow-guests. There were a half-dozen drunks still snoring and a couple of Negroes by a window. It was cold in the room. There was no heat and the barred windows were unglazed.

"Matthew, lad!" the

One of the drunks sat up, groaning. He was a small man with a bold nose that dominated his face. He seemed to remember something as he came fully awake, for he reached for a box that stood beside his pallet, covered by a hood.

WHEN he fumblingly raised the covering, Matthew was surprised to see a bamboo cage in which two pigeons solemnly blinked at the light. He saw Matthew watching him and brought the cage to the window. "Right here," he said, "ends the old life for Joseph Dufferin. No more port laced with rum. And no more pigeons."

Matthew asked how the pigeons had contributed to his delinquency. Dufferin only scowled and began groping in his pocket. He found a pencil and a scrap of paper and scrawled three words with the wall for a desk: "Chatham Square Watch-house." This he slipped into a cylinder which he af-

Captain said. "How'd you know I was master of the Jamaica?"

fixed to the leg of one of the pigeons. He pushed the pigeon through the bars. Then he sat down beside Matthew on the bed.

Matthew said again: "How have the pigeons dragged you down?"

Dufferin looked at him in surprise with his watery eyes. It was a tallowy face without any strength, the chin receding, the mouth small. If it had not been pigeons, Matthew thought, it would have been something else.

"Why, racing them, sir!" Dufferin said. "We have a club that races carriers every Saturday from the Elysian Fields. But some time ago we fell into the habit of taking a glass of rum at the Hoboken ferry while we waited for the boat. And, do you know, sir, we have been too inebriated to race the pigeons at all these last eight months!"

Matthew said: "I suppose the message you sent was for someone to come and bail you out?"

"My wife, more's the shame."

For a moment there was silence; then Matthew said quietly: "If you were serious about getting rid of the birds, Dufferin, I'll buy them."

"Friend," said Dufferin, "you go into this with your eyes open. I'll sell my flock for five dollars."

"Would your friends in the club sell theirs?" Matthew asked him.

"After last night I daresay you could buy the whole club out for twenty dollars." Joseph Dufferin returned moodily to his pallet.

DUFFERIN'S wife bailed him out shortly after noon.

Matthew had made a down payment on all the pigeons owned by the club. Where the rest would come from was puzzling. Perhaps when God showed Mr. Dowd where to find the fifty dollars to bail him out, he would throw in another twenty and do the job right.

At three o'clock the turnkey appeared again and called out: "Matthew Holland! A gentleman's gone your bail."

Jeremiah Ballantine was waiting on the sidewalk. "A black day, Matt," he said. "My own sister's boy in jail on my account; and me coming closer to a pirate's grave every hour! It's clear I must weigh anchor on the next tide or pour the brandy in the bay."

Matthew said: "There's a cove on Fisher's Island where we could hide it for months. Unload it there tonight, if you must leave. I'll have the money when you make port again. And since you've already done me one favor today, perhaps you'll do me another. I've bought some pigeons. If you'll lend me twenty dollars to pay for them, I'll repay you when I can."

Ballantine turned the collar of his sea-coat against the wind. "This is no time for hobbies," he said ill-humoredly.

Matthew said, smiling: "It's business, Uncle. I'm going to race them against Fletcher's brickbat reporters!"

Monday morning William Street discovered the unsightly loft atop the *Standard* shop, and stopped to read a new sign in the window:

THE ONLY NEWSPAPER WITH PIGEON SERVICE FROM THE HARBOR.

Mr. Dowd was not optimistic. "The French news will be stale before these birds are broken to the new loft," he argued. "Dufferin says they can't be used until Thursday."

"It's a chance," Matthew said. "Every ruffian on the street is wearing a *Ledger* brassard. If the pigeons work out, our reputation is made. There isn't another flock in the city. Dufferin says we'd have to go to England for any more."

Mr. Dowd said, "Ah, well." He began to set an editorial

THAT afternoon he talked about money. He could, he figured, scrape up four dollars a week for Matthew. This would feed him and he could sleep in the shop.

Mr. Dowd said: "If Fletcher prints the war news first, I expect I will go back to job printing. Steady money, Matthew, is a thing greatly to be desired at my age."

Matthew wondered why he qualified the maxim. He could not go back to Campbell's and he might be blackballed with all the other wine-sellers in the city. His bridges were all burned and the ashes were cold.

During the week Fletcher assembled a fleet of rowboats which met every incoming ship. They kept the Narrows locked up like a door, and God help the man who tried to get through. After Thursday Matthew was out in the boat every day with a couple of birds in a cage, but he was never given a chance to contact a ship.

He had one small hope. He did not mention it to Mr. Dowd, for if he had thought the pigeon service fantastic, what would he think of this other notion? And then Matthew did not think so much of the idea himself.

Sunday morning Matthew put his extra shirt and good suit in a cardboard box and prepared to vacate his room. He could tell himself that he was lucky to be quit of it; that a man only made himself ridiculous by trying to pul' himself up by his bootstraps. He could remember what Uncle Jeremiah had said about this being America, where one man was as good as another. But mottoes did not help when you were full of the need of someone.

Down in the street a man shouted: "Matthew Holland up there?"

Matthew put his head out the window and said, "Who wants him?"

Then he saw that it was Joseph Dufferin. Dufferin waved a paper, and Matthew's heart began to strike his

ribs. He ran down, and when he read the note his hand shook. He gave Dufferin a quarter for his trouble, and Dufferin said, "Thanks, friend," and went off to meet his own friends.

Matthew was halfway to the shop when he encountered Mr. Dowd—hurrying along hatless, his ink-stained beard parted by the wind. The old man seized Matthew by the shoulders. His face was red and for the first time Matthew saw anger in it.

"God forgive me, Matthew," he said, "I could kill them all! They stole the pigeon!"

Mr. Dowd closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I was in the shop when the bird came in. Before I could climb the ladder one of those condemned *Ledger* hoodlums was on the roof and had the bird in his pocket. They'll be printing the news in an hour—and we haven't even set the type!"

Matthew took him gently by the arm. "We won't worry about it," he said. "It was nothing of importance, anyway. Sing 'Rock of Ages,' and hope for the best."

They went along the street, Mr. Dowd singing and Matthew writing in his mind the biggest news story of the decade. . . .

Fletcher's boys were shouting the news in the street an hour before the last *Standard* had rolled off the old Napier press. Matthew had just begun to dole out their own extras when Fletcher appeared in the door. He had a roll of papers under his arm and he was trying not to smile.

"I trust you gentlemen have heard that we are at war," he said. "But, of course—where would you have had your own news but from the *Ledger!* We have sold twenty-five hundred copies already—all over the city."

HE laid a copy on the imposing stone. Matthew glanced at it, and then, shaking his head, he said to Fletcher: "And you say, they're all over town?"

Fletcher's expression was that of a skater who hears the creak of thin ice. He said carefully: "Well—what about it?"

Matthew said: "Why, it's an odd thing, but we had it that the first installment of French indemnities will be here in two days! There won't be any war."

Illustrated by John Fulton

Matthew looked at Mr. Dowd and the two leatherheads. He said: "Is this your party, Fletcher?"

Fletcher laughed harshly. "That won't do, Holland. We aren't getting news from two-days-out quite yet."

"Progress, Mr. Fletcher," said Matthew. "The first dispatch came today from the *Jamaica*. Captain Ballantine agreed to take a dozen pigeons along when he put out last week, in case he encountered any incoming ships. Of course the bird returned to the old loft, but I suppose it was just as well. Eh, Mr. Fletcher?"

Mr. Fletcher did not express himself. He departed rather hurriedly to stop his printers, who were still going on with the fiasco. . . .

Anne must have been seated at the window, for as Matthew approached the house the door opened and she ran down the steps to meet him. She put her arms about him and kissed him, and did not draw away when the kiss was finished.

She said: "I won't mind Water Street, Matthew. I know how to save and I can make my own clothes—"

"We won't have to live on Water Street," Matthew said.

"Of course not. You'll have an interest in the paper. We'll show Father and that man, Fletcher!"

"I've already shown Fletcher," Matthew said. "Now, if your father is at home, I'll set about showing *him*."

JAMES CAMPBELL'S smile wilted when he saw Matthew. He said curtly: "Well, sir?"

"Mr. Campbell," Matthew said, "I suppose you know I spent last Sunday in jail."

"Not surprisingly."

"Still and all," said Matthew, "it was the turning-point in my life. As a result of that visit, I have just shown the city what a rogue and a fool Adam Fletcher is."

"So? I have just read the war news in the *Ledger*. As yet I have not heard the *Standard* being cried at all."

"When you do," Matthew said, "you will hear the truth—it will be, 'Peace!' Fletcher fell into a very simple trap. But then," he added, "he is a very simple man. And by the way—I have some information on your brandy."

Mr. Campbell regarded him steadily. He said: "Won't you sit down, Matthew?"

Matthew sat stiffly with his hat on his lap. "According to one of my informants," he said, "it has been located on Fisher's Island. I'll see that it is brought back tomorrow."

Mr. Campbell was not one to question a gift too closely. He murmured: "Excellent!"

Anne said: "Matthew has rather a turn for business, hasn't he, Father?"

"I wish one of our men had shown as good sense," said James Campbell. He sat there frowning, his lower lip pulled up, and suddenly he said: "Hang it, Matthew, is there any reason you can't work for both of us, as you have been? I'll raise your salary to twenty-one and let you stay here."

Matthew said: "That would be fine, sir. I have been thinking of moving to larger quarters."

Mr. Campbell reached for the bell-pull. "Something from the wine-cellar might go well," he said. "Jonathan, Mr. Holland and I will have a glass of the Napoleon. Some port for Miss Anne." He added, lowering his voice: "And Jonathan—no water."

DARK of the MOON

BLACKIE could've dug a whole-pound of wild ginseng easier than to write that letter; in his eleven years he had not been inside a schoolhouse. Uncle Ed didn't "believe much in schoolin'." But the letter had to be written, and with a pencil-stub and piece of sugar-sack, he wrote it.

The letter was about old slowpoke 'possum, the lowly animal which some people ate and some people wore on their backs and never knowed it was 'possum fur. 'Possum was just about the most plentiful animal in those rocky hills, and its fur brought a bang-up price. Trouble was, old 'possum was a wise one, and he had the trappers and hunters all "whupped."

Sixteen-year-old Molly, who had been taking care of the Barclay home for five years now, came into the toolshed to gather eggs. Somehow he and Molly were very close. She never mentioned the orphan business, or hinted around she knew more than she was telling, or made any slurs about how they'd taken him and Harl in when their mother died. Molly wasn't exactly a Black Barclay, like him and Harl, but she wasn't shy of it much.

"Looky, Molly." He smoothed the piece of sack and read to her:

October Tooth

Dear Brother Harl, Miamopolis—

I take my pen in hand to let you know that I am well and hope you are the same but this possum business has got me stumped. Possum will be high price this winter, mebbe two dollars a pelt. Trouble is, while it's warm weather and they run, the fur's no count, and when it gets cold and the fur is prime they won't run a lick.

Right now me and Pup could take three-four a night, but dreckly they'll hole up and tell us to go fish.

Kin you whup this puzzle?

Blackie.

He looked up at Molly and his eyes begged her to agree that Harl could solve this contrariness of nature and 'possums. It was a grave matter.

"Harl can't whup nature, honey," Molly said. In that household she had already learned not to hope much about anything. She lowered her voice. "You want a stamp, huh?"

"No. Going over to Gibbston. Begone four-five days. What little work's around here Charley and Guy kin do."

"Pa'll give you a damning for pitching off."

"Uncle Ed'll damn me nohow. I 'ud think he'd want me gone, the way he throws up to me 'bout living here on him."

IN the haymow where he slept during the snowless season, Blackie donned his sateen shirt and clean overalls, and slung his shoes across his shoulders. Outside the barn he whistled cautiously for Pup and faded down through the ironweeds to Papaw creek. There he scrubbed himself with sand, took a swim, flicked himself dry; then hit the footpath for Gibbston, nine miles across the wooded hills.

On a briar knob Pup treed a groundhog in a sassafras. After stoppering the near-by den, Blackie

The story of a mountain boyhood, by the author of "Forbidden Valley" and "The Titans of Boone Head."

by WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

cooned the sapling and shook the groundhog out. Pup wrassled it to the plugged-up hole and there killed it.

While the lean young dog was eating, Blackie sat on a boulder and gazed north over the autumnal hills, wishing he could see how Harl was making out, in that big city, that big school. When Harl got through next May he wouldn't be a hillikin any more; wouldn't ever have to hunt skunks or plow a hillside new-ground any more. He was going to make fighter planes. On account of the coughing trouble they had rejectioned him as a flyer; so he'd said: "If I can't fly 'em, by the Lord I'll build 'em!" That was how a Black Barclay whistled Billy Burgoon.

But Harl wouldn't ever get through school—if that sickness came back on him and started galloping.

The blue-beautiful mistiness of the hills reminded Blackie that the summer, when he had plenty of garden stuff to eat and slept in the airy haymow and could go loping the deep woods whenever things got too tight around the place, was at an end. Now murky old winter loomed, with no warm clothes for the slush and cold, no school to get away to, and Uncle Ed eternally hanging close in the house and grumping.

Harl hadn't any idea how bad things had got around there, or he'd be ripping some hides off. But it wasn't right to let on to him; he had a tough row to hoe himself.

Blackie turned on the boulder, and looked back to Papaw, at the old farmhouse in the mouth of the hollow. It was all the home he ever remembered, and it lay pretty in the soft sunshine, against the autumnal colors of the woods. But that bitter point had come when it was no longer his home; it was a black hole he had to get out of, and this 'possum business might get him out.

Near sundown he stopped by a brook just out of Gibbston and put on his shoes, then walked with dignity into the little town.

In Cat Wherlee's general store a group of men were joshing Al Armley about the tourist camp Al had put up on the gravel road to Roundville. Funny thing how them little bungalettes drew tourists from Roundville, Warden City, and even from twenty-five miles away.

To tall gaunt Preacher Ingles the bungalettes weren't funny. He said that people in the Lord ought to burn the camp down, and threatened to pray openly next Sunday for Al's redemption, and say why. Was there not enough sin—he turned and looked hard at Blackie—in the world already?

Blackie had no ears for the talk, nor would he let himself look at Cat's new winter stock of felt boots, Michigans, mittens, wool underwear. All the money from the 'possum business, if Harl whupped the puzzle, had to go to getting him and Pup out of Papaw.

He said to the red-faced proprietor: "Cat, I got a letter kin you send to Harl fer me?" He took out the letter.

Wherlee read the letter without being invited, to see what the kid was up to now. The 'possum foolishness interested him exactly none. He demanded:

"When's Slippery Ed selling them red shoats, kid?"

"Un't know," Blackie said ashamedly. Uncle Ed owed Cat money and had promised him the shoats; and that was why Cat was keeping close tab. "But kin you send my letter?"

"You got a stamp?"

"Nope, I haint."

Cat took thought. In the past he had several times dealt with Blackie Barclay to good profit; and now his slow gaze went out to the littered yard and the muddy sedan in which he'd been bird hunting.

"I'll give you a stamp—and envelope too," he said loftily. "Now, what's Harl's address?"

"Miamop'lis, Cat."

"Sure, but what street and house? Miamop'lis aint no little knot-hole."

"It's Summit Street something, Cat; I fergit what."

MARY OLDFIELD, the Gibbston teacher, had come into the store a minute before. She said, "I know Harl's address."

Cat winked at the other men. "Now aint that *pec*uliar, Mary, you knowing where Harl stays!"

"No, it's not peculiar," Mary said quietly. "What's more, Cat, I'll send that letter myself. You'd have Blackie slaving around here all evening for a three-cent stamp. Blackie, come home to supper with me."

This put Blackie on a spot. He had to stay at Gibbston for Harl's answer, and Mary didn't have any barn to bed down in or any choring to do. Putting up with her would be like taking charity, and that was a bigger disgrace than jail. The bread of charity could be God's bitterest bread, Harl said.

He finally bade Mary, "You give Harl's address to Cat and let him tend to this." He didn't mean to speak unfriendly. He just hadn't learned to say what was really in his head.

So for four days he stayed at Cat's store, which was also the postoffice. He slept under a counter, ate what Cat saw fit to give him, and raked up cheese-scraps and suchlike for Pup. In return he worked from dawn till after dark, doing the hundred minor things which small fast hands could do better than big, whisky-muddled ones.

On Thursday evening Mary invited him to a sociable at the schoolhouse, and afterward she let him take her home, under the big red moon. While they were having sassafras tea and cookies in her living-room, she gave him an arithmetic book to study on at home, saying:

"You'll 'whup' that book for me, won't you, Blackie?"

"Durn tootin'! A Black Barclay kin do anything he takes a mind to."

Mary frowned prettily. "A Black Barclay—what on earth is that?"

Blackie was astonished to see that Harl hadn't told Mary they were Black Barclays. But he quickly saw

why Harl didn't. Harl just wasn't the sort of fellow to brag around to his girl. But it was all right for somebody else to.

"Why," he said, "being's you haint heard, I'll tell you if you'll keep it tight secret. Harl cautioned me not to tell a soul on earth."

"I won't whisper a word, Blackie."

Blackie gave Pup a kick on the sly for biting fleas around in front of a lady. "I didn't know 'bout it myself, Mary, for a long while. Not till that day Harl was pitching out of the hills, and I come along to Gibbston, and we set on a knob and talked. I was feeling turrible low that day, losing my brother and being alone on Papaw. But when Harl told me 'bout my being a kink-tailed Black Barclay, it bucked me up no end, and I been bucked up by it ever since."

Mary's brown eyes were wide open. "Go on, Blackie."

According to Harl, Blackie explained, there had been Black Barclays since long before George Washington. They cropped up, you never knowed where or how-come, all full of brains and fight, and they never failed to cut a fancy swath in the world. There was a general was a Black Barclay, and there were others that wouldn't fool around with only being a general. There hadn't been any for a long spell, till right now.

Mary almost whispered: "And you're one!"

Blackie nodded. "Aint no doubting it, Harl says. I got all the dead-sure signs. And there's nothing on earth nicer than always knowing you're a Black Barclay, Mary. If it hadn't been for that, I couldn't ever have stuck it out, on Papaw."

MARY got up quickly and went to recheat the tea and she was still blinking her eyes fast when she came back in. She looked up at the mantel photo—at the jaunty and handsome Harl—and touched his ring to her lips out of pride in him. How bright a lantern he had lighted for a little fellow, to help him through a long dark time alone! That was how gentle and understanding he would be with her, in their days of trouble. But what if that light should go out for Blackie and he learned the harsh reality about himself? Dear God, stay that time a little longer! . . .

The Saturday train brought Harl's answer. Blackie thrust the letter unopened into his shirt and whizzed out of the store, wanting privacy for the ecstasy or despair in that envelope.

Where the pike crossed Gibbs Creek, he scrambled down under the covered bridge. It was a very private place; a man had hanged himself there once, and now people kept strictly away.

Harl's letter was neatly typed. As Blackie read, a joy gripped him as fierce as any green-apple colic. He let out a whoop, turned a cartwheel and gave Pup a rib-thumping. Clear back to the days of Israel Putnam, the trappers of those hills had been stumped by the 'possum problem; and here Harl, on a page of paper, had made it lay right down and eat dirt!

Through the dwindling days that followed, Blackie did his full share of the farm work, but his own days really began at nightfall. Every evening after supper he filled his dark lantern with lard and coal-oil, and was off across the creek to the hollows of papaw and persimmon.

In the night woods he walked slowly along the paths while Pup ranged the hillside and rocks. When Pup lit out on a hot trail vociferously, that meant a coon and Blackie called him back; he wasn't studying durned coons. But when the Walker barked a few times easy-like in one place, Blackie hurried to the spot and usually found Pup prancing around under a tree or vine mat. The dark lantern shined a pair of reddish eyes; Blackie climbed up and rapped the 'possum to make it play dead: then he untwisted its tail and chunked it into his tote sack; and that was two dollars more—if everything panned out all right.

Sometimes a grape mat thick with clusters was good for two animals; and once, from a persimmon heavy with sugar-ripe fruit, he plucked five big grinning 'possums at one haul.

"Catch them now while the catching is good," Harl had written, "and pen them up till cold weather. Then you can go out and pick prime 'possums out of the leaves as easy as picking gooseberries!"

The simple genius of Harl's plan was awesome.

BUT Harl had not written a word about whether the coughing trouble had come back: and Blackie carried that ugly question with him constantly—through the farm work by day and the dark woods at night.

Too, Uncle Ed was acting funny. He didn't cuss around about the 'possum venture, or pitch in and help, with one of his short-lived enthusiasms. He just didn't do anything; and that was another ugly fear to live with.

Blackie penned his 'possums in a string of old turkey-coops six to a coop; and right away he discovered they weren't the dumb easygoers they looked. They were always breaking out; they growled and fought around all night; and they were durned cannibals. Often in the morning there'd only be five 'possums and some bones in a cage.

To keep his odd livestock in grub took hustling. Hungry brutes at any time, they were especially avid then, with the fall hunger of any hibernator. Blackie dumped in sacks of pokeberries, grapes, persimmons, papaws, cut-up pumpkins, butchering offal, corn, everything. One help was, they weren't persnickety. They'd eat whatever was handy, including each other.

Through the rest of October and all of November the weather was above usual for hunting. Mostly the nights were warm,—which made the animals run well,—and damp, which made easy trailing for Pup. In hours of moonlight few fur-bearers stirred out of their dens; and besides, Pup, who was a young scalawag of undisciplined ways, would quit chasing fur the minute the moon came up and would go yelping around in brier patches after worthless rabbits. Toward the end of November came a dark of the moon, and then the 'possums fairly rolled into the coops.

Why these black nights were better for fur, he had never figured out; but Harl seemed to know. The dark of the moon, Harl said, was always a lucky time, a challenging time. Then the blackness silenced even the hoot owls, but the fighting animals ran.

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FOR OVERSEAS A.P.O. ADDRESS, SOLDIER'SOWNREQUESTREQUIRED

Illustrated by Roy Besser

"You ought to be tarred and feathered, Cat Wherlee," Mary Oldfield said.

Then the earth slept soundly and renewed herself. She and her children who were brave of heart liked nights as black as days were golden.

Altogether, Blackie brought in a hundred and sixty 'possums; and when the creeks caught over and the first heavy snow lay white on the hills, he had a hundred and eleven safely cooped up, most of them "large-I's." As the December cold tightened down they snuggled sleepily into their warm straw, and their appetites tailed off, and they finally said when. You could stick a crackling right into the grinning mouth of one, and he wouldn't study it.

Every morning, regular, while he was doing the milking and Charley and Guy were fussing about who'd do this and that, he'd see Uncle Ed walk out to the coops, pull out a 'possum, and blow on its fur to see how prime the pelt was. Then he'd stand there chewing on his mustache. He got a weekly fur list from Jep Haines, who rode around on horseback buying peltry; and once the two of them had a long talk back of the corncrib.

Jep must have spread it around about that slew of 'possums the Barclay boy's dog had caught, because one day a man down Papaw near the Indian mounds sent word he'd pay twenty dollars for the dog, and Uncle Ed sent word back to come and get Pup. Blackie had seen this happen once before, with a pup Harl had trained, and he could still hear that dog howl, blubbering, all down the road and out of sight. Instead of waiting for that to happen to Pup, he used his noggin; he got Pup down and fed him a big gollop of soft soap and sweet calomel. When the man came on Sunday, Pup was so weazy-eyed and g'ant that the man said, "Hell's fire!" and spit and walked off.

The incident left Blackie shaken because he knew what was coming next; he could see disaster sneaking closer every day, and he was little, alone and helpless. Only Harl could stop it—and Harl wasn't coming till Christmas, if then.

By his own ciphering—though he hadn't whupped the arithmetic book, he'd got well along—he had a good two hundred dollars dozing in the straw in the old turkey-coops; and he went to sleep nights thinking of the day when he would break out of this godless life to the bright strange world where Harl had gone. With two hundred wagon-wheels in his pocket he wouldn't be a drag on Harl. That much money would last a coon's age.

On December eighteenth he began flensing and stretching the peltry. It was hard disagreeable work, standing there in the slush by the corncrib, his hands stiff from the numbing wind; but when he got through, the rafters hung thick with the biggest batch of prime 'possum ever seen in those parts.

On Saturday before Christmas he braved a storm and hurried across to Gibbston to meet the week-end train. In a savage wind and a rain that turned to ice as it fell, the train wheezed in. But no Harl.

BITTERLY disappointed, Blackie went into the store to thaw out before starting home. There was a chance Harl would catch a Valley freight to Pickler Junction the day before Christmas and walk home, saving money and two of his hard-working days. But it was a next-to-nothing chance.

In the store Cat pounced on Blackie on sight. "You there, kid!" He was rushed with holiday business, and nursing a hangover. "I heared your Uncle Ed sold them red shoats over to Pickler. How 'bout it?"

"Uh, yes," Blackie stammered. "He wagoned 'em acrost, I guess."

"Well, you tell him to git his frame over here and square with me or he'll lay it out in jail!"

The store was jammed with people, and Cat bawled his threat so that everyone heard. Blackie burned with shame. Why in heaven hadn't Uncle Ed paid some on these debts and bought winter clothes and grub for the family, instead of lugging home that wooden tub of hard candy and that *Lives of the Presidents* and buying that fancy double-barrel? He'd promised the shoats to Cat and then he'd sneaked 'em off to Pickler—and that was the same as stealing.

Cat came clumping over to Blackie. "'Nother thing, kid! When you was hanging around this store three-four days in October, I missed some cash out of the stamp till. You're jest another slippery—"

Blackie had a hot explosive temper and it exploded now. "You're a damn' liar!" he shrilled, his voice breaking. "I never stoled a penny off any person on earth. Don't go calling *me* any slippery Barclay!"

"Hell," Cat sneered, "you aint even that, kid; you aint no Barclay at all! Your mom was mebbe a Barclay before she run off to Miamop'lis and lived there without the preacher

knowing anything about it, but that don't make *you* any Barclay. The devil knows what your real name—"

"*Cat!*" The word flew across the store like a blacksnake whip and struck Cat so hard it stopped him from saying anything more. Blackie whirled around and saw Mary; he had not known she was in the store. Everyone was looking at her and kept still as she walked over to Cat.

"You ought to be tarred and feathered for that, Cat Wherlee, and if I'd tell Harl about this, he'd do it." She put an arm around Blackie's shoulders and said firmly: "You're going home with me. You're not starting across the hills in a dangerous blizzard like this."

UNSEEINGLY Blackie trudged beside Mary down the walk, his gum boots squishing. In a general way he knew now what had lain behind the queer remarks and queer silences which he had more and more begun to notice; and this discovery staggered him. He thought of the store full of people back there, and people all through these hills, talking, snickering; and he wanted to run off.

Mary knew what he was thinking. She said softly, "Don't let anything Cat says hurt you, Blackie." She drew his cold left hand into her muff. "Years and years ago, when your mother was about the age I am now, and lived over there on Papaw, she was the prettiest girl in the hills, with the black eyes and hair she gave you. Cat Wherlee wanted to marry her, but she refused him and went away. That old hurt inside of him is what makes him say cutting things."

"But it's a fact—what he said," Blackie quavered.

"That's true, it's a fact. But what of it?"

"Plenty!"

"No. Not with most people. And certainly not with me. As proof it isn't, there's this, Blackie!" She held out her hand and made him look at the symbol of the covenant between her and Harl.

This perked Blackie up a little. Come to think of it, people really had been mighty good, except a very few. They had sheltered him with a wall of silence; they were always saying, "Hi-yah, Blackie!" extra warm; and Harl was marrying the finest girl in all that country.

The fact remained, bewildering and unbelievable, that he wasn't a Black Barclay, wasn't a Barclay at all. But he had a boundless faith that Harl would explain this some way, just as he'd once explained that a man who didn't exist at all except in people's hearts nevertheless brought bags of happiness once a year to all the children of the world. Maybe there was some angle like that to this Black Barclay story.

"I—I wish Harl was here," he sniffled. Harl would see that the peltry kept safe and that Pup wasn't sold.

"I wish it too, Blackie," Mary said. "Just as much as you do."

"Did he write you anything about"—he hesitated over the momentous question—"about that sickness, Mary?"

"No. But that doesn't prove anything, Blackie. He may have been in doubt himself and not have wanted to say anything at all till he knew positively that it wasn't coming back on him."

Mary's voice was brave, but Blackie heard a tremble of fear in it; and when he looked up at her face, he saw that she too was worried, badly.

On the day before Christmas the blizzard abated and he hurried across the hills, reaching home at noon. Through the falling snow he saw a light in the front room of the old farmhouse. Nearer, he heard two voices. A wild joy seized him. One of the men was Harl.

He started to barge through the door, but stopped. Harl always made him go away when quarrels broke, and it certainly was a quarrel going on in there. He heard Harl boom:

"Like sin you're entitled to everything he earns! That's the damn'-sorriest excuse for thievery I ever heard. But keep that money! If there's any doubt about Blackie and me owing you a charity cent for being allowed to live here and work our heads off, well, it's paid back now. That money pays it back."

A suspicion hit Blackie. He tore for the corncrib and slammed open the door—

To the last pelt he had been cleaned out, during his absence. In the hasty way of thievery, the empty stretching-boards littered the floor, the corn, the grinder bench. Jep Haines, the co-conspirator, had dropped a telltale cigar butt there, and then ridden off with two hundred dollars' worth of green peltry. Ridden off with Blackie's hope of getting out of Papaw. Now there wouldn't be any going away. . . .

After a while, in the straw shed where he took his woe, he heard Harl calling for him. He swiped his eyes with snow, and went out. Harl was waiting for him by the empty turkey-coops.

Harl had on nice clothes, and had the strangeness of the big city all about him. He was still so hot under the collar that his "Hello" was sort of growled out. Under his arm he held a small bundle of duds, wrapped in a sateen shirt.

"Blackie, Blackie," he said, after their handshake, "why on earth didn't you tell me you were in hard lines here? I knew it was rough sledding, but not *this* rough!" He kicked a turkey-coop and busted a slat. "Let's clear out. I've got your clothes here. We'll spend Christmas with Mary, then you're going to Miamopolis with me."

"Hunh?"

"You heard. I'm taking you to Miamopolis."

"But—but I aint got any money now."

"Well, sure; you just paid off a big debt for us both. It's my turn now. I'll manage for both of us somehow. It's only three or four months till I get onto the job and Mary will be with us then. Don't argue." He kicked some more slats out of the coop. "The way you've kept quiet about your troubles, I wouldn't have suspected much at all if it hadn't been for this 'possum robbery. We're going—now! And whistle for that cussed pup of yours—he goes too!"

All this was dazing to Blackie. Leaving Papaw, spending Christmas with Mary, going to Miamopolis, living with Harl—he tried to snub his surge of joy, and not believe it too much. But if it was so, then it was the 'possums, after all, that did it. That was what Harl had exploded about. They'd been stole, he didn't have a cent from 'em, but they were taking him out of Papaw just the same!

As they headed for the footlog at the creek, he kept glancing at Harl's face. It didn't look peaked or drawn, but he couldn't be sure that the sickness wasn't clutching Harl again. If it was, then they wouldn't be going to Miamopolis; and Harl wouldn't be managing for anybody, even himself—if that trouble had come back.

Across the icy footlog, he suggested: "Harl, how about running a race—from here up to the old worm fence?"

"A race? In this weather? What for?"

"Nothing 'tall. Jest want to race."

"Well, all right. Get set. Ready?"

THEY were off, up the long hillside, Pup easily outdistancing them both. For perhaps fifty yards Blackie managed to make something of a race of it; but then he dropped hopelessly behind, and Harl reached the rail fence a hundred feet in front.

Blackie came up panting, looked closely at Harl; then he turned his head away.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Harl said. "Blackie! You cry-baby, sniffling over getting whupped!"

Blackie didn't answer. He wasn't crying about losing the race, but because Harl had breasted the long slope at top speed and yet wasn't having the least bit of that coughing trouble—he wasn't even breathing hard!

BLACKMAIL

One of Detective Mooney's strangest cases

by KERRY O'NEIL

Illustrated by Manning de V. Lee

THE telephone buzzed and Jerry Mooney took it up. "Mooney—Proceedings," he said.

"Hello, Jerry. This is Grat Eberly, of Sky Line."

"Oh, yes," said Jerry. "Glad to hear from you."

"This is a little tip. Star Daguay's coming around to see you. She's got a case for you. But it's nothing at all Just brush her off."

"Well, most of them I have are nothing. But I must listen, just the same."

"The gal's temperamental," said Eberly. "Awful hard to control. But she's got talent, and I've got to nurse her along. Be nice to her, but don't listen too much."

Jerry hung up the telephone, and said to his secretary.

"More about the fan dancer: The manager of the Sky Line, where she's performing, says to give her no attention."

The quick fingers of Mickey Sayre paused in their tapping of the typewriter keys.

"That's what this Roy Weathermore told me when he called a while ago. He left it for you as advice."

Jerry laughed, and said:

"The last time I heard Roy trying to advise some one, they were bouncing him out of the Hotel Etruria bar."

"He said if you took Daguay's case you'd be inviting trouble," said Mickey.

"Proceedings involving parties who get themselves photographed with fan dancers aren't usually in my line," said Jerry. "But there are different

Jerry stood in the doorway and saw the silent form of Star. There was a dreadful wound on her head.

Weathermore shouted to Jerry: "Well, she has sent it! This may spoil my marriage!"

angles to things; so we'll give Star a listen-to, anyway."

"Weathermore talked very large," said Mickey. "Who is he?"

"He was a football player—college, and afterward pro. A big fellah who likes to slug it out as a finish to an argument. Has been known to drag barkeepers over bars. A nice quiet kind of a party—if you let him have his way. The Army has him ticketed as 4-A just now; I understand he has a football knee. But there's talk of them taking another look at him."

LATER on, Star Daguay came in. She was beautifully dressed, had a lithesome figure, large blue eyes and the customary blonde hair.

"I called you a while ago," she said in Mooney's side office. "I'm having man trouble. Since I've been dancing at Sky Line there's a young party named Weathermore who's been tracking me around. Well, one night Grat Eberly, owner of the Sky Line, has a little joke on me. I'd just finished my principal number out on the floor and was going to my dressing-room: Grat has a photographer doing shots at the place for newspaper publicity, and he asks me to pose. Well, I'm not anxious to do it, because my feet are killing me; but I do it just the same. It's a fan picture. And what does he do but put this Weathermore alongside me, with us both peeping over the edge of the fan."

"Nice for the evening papers," said Jerry.

"They never saw it," said Star Daguay, "because I got hold of it before it was an hour old." She took one of Jerry's cigarettes; he held a lighter for her; she crossed her shapely legs, and smoked. **"You see, I'd made up my mind I could like Roy. Also, his family were in the malt-extract business and I'd got news of the** money they had. So I didn't want any clouds rolling across the moon.

"But by-and-by I got to hear of another girl. Her name's Eda Strom. She also has heavy money. And I found Roy was engaged to her. And when I blazed into him about it, he stopped dropping around after the show. . . . At first," said Star Daguay, "I only felt hurt. Then I thought I might as well make a little out of it. So I wrote and told him I was all set to turn over the fan photograph to the newspapers. And I would, unless he talked in an interesting way."

"That," said Jerry, "was a mistake."

"So I found out," said the girl. "He phoned me it was blackmail, and that he'd take me into court. 'All right,' I says to him, 'if I go into court I'll take plenty of things with me that you'll not like to hear talked about!'"

"And then," said Jerry, "you told him you were coming to see me."

"How did you know that?" she asked, surprised.

"He told me over the telephone." Just then there was the sound of a banging door in the outer office, of heavy feet, of a loud voice. "And I wouldn't be surprised if that was Roy in person," Jerry added.

It was. And in a few minutes the place was filled with contending charges, denials and countercharges.

"The only thing I want is reasonable damages," said Miss Daguay. "For the way you kicked my reputation around, and then getting yourself engaged to somebody else, leaving me flat."

"You were after money from me, right from the start," accused Weathermore. He was a stocky, ugly-tempered person who waved his fists and had a vicious glint in his eye.

"What about yourself?" asked Star witheringly.

"Money from you? Why, you haven't got a dime!" shouted Weathermore.

"No, but this Strom girl has! I've been asking around about her. You're afraid your people'll throw you out because of the way you've been carrying on, and you thought you'd best get yourself located. I'll have to be smoothed, Roy. Keep that in your mind. If it's not done by this time tomorrow, I'll get that film printed and send it out. And while I'm sending, I'll see to it that Strom gets one—just to make sure she sees it."

With that the fan dancer left the office in a most spirited manner. Jerry followed her down the hall: as she waited for the elevator, he said:

"Don't be too fast sending the picture."

She smiled at him.

"I've never intended to send it anywhere," she said. "Not to the girl; and not to the newspapers. My idea is just to talk enough about it to get some of that malt-extract money started my way."

When Jerry returned he found Weathermore in the outer office, speaking to Mickey.

"Get me Pickering 8492," he was saying. In a few moments he had the number. "Is that you, Eda? . . . Well, get her right away. This is Roy." In another few moments he shouted into the receiver: "Eda? . . . Yes, Roy. Listen to what I'm going to say. I've heard from that girl again. She says she's going to send a copy of that picture to you. Well, when it arrives, don't open the package. I don't want you to see a thing like that. . . . What? . . . Well, because she was hardly dressed at all. Now, listen! It wasn't my fault. The whole thing was a fix—done to get money out of me." There was a pause, and then: "What do you mean—you've already got it?"

AGAIN there was a pause, with Weathermore writhing with rage and crimson of face. Mickey, catching Jerry's eye, winked at him.

"You don't have to tell me what kind of a picture it is," Weathermore said then. "I know. That's why I didn't want you to see it. But this little trick'll do her no good. I'll stop the thing from getting in the papers, trust me for that!"

He put down the telephone, and shouted to Jerry:

"Daguay said she was going to send the photograph to Miss Strom. Well, she *has* sent it! This may spoil my marriage!" His hands were clenched, and the look in his eye more vicious

than ever. "But whether it does or not, I'll tell that dame something she'll never forget!"

Mickey had jotted down Eda Strom's telephone number. And after Weathermore had gone, Jerry called and spoke to the girl. After telling her how he figured in the matter, he said:

"While Miss Daguay has thought of employing me, I'm not sure I'll have anything to do with the matter. It's a kind of thing that's not in my line."

"A detective!" said Miss Strom. Her voice was cold, and there was a superior something in it that made Jerry lift his brows. "Why should she want a detective?"

"That is not quite clear to me," said Jerry.

"I love Roy," said the girl in her icy voice. "And this woman is trying to destroy my happiness. Another thing: she could not get any money from him. He has none of his own."

"I think she knows that," said Jerry. "I have a feeling she's been looking you up and has made up her mind that *you* have."

"Oh!" This was long-drawn-out; also the voice changed; there was a lift to it that told of startled anger. "She had better be careful!"

"Any part I'll play in this proceeding," said Jerry, "is to smooth it out. And, depend on it, whatever else happens, if I take it there'll be no noise."

"That will suit me," said Miss Strom coldly and quietly. "But no matter what else happens, I'll not permit this woman to break up my marriage, or make me a laughing-stock."

After Jerry had put down the telephone, he said to Mickey:

"In this lady, I think punching Roy Weathermore has picked a true mate. From the way she sounds, if Daguay said two words to her, she'd have her down on the mat, taking her apart."

He then called Star Daguay at her apartment.

"I've just got in," she said.

"Just in time for me to tell you I've found out you've been double-talking me."

"I never do that," said the fan dancer sharply. "Everything I told you is true."

"You said you'd send this Eda Strom that photograph. She says you've already sent it."

"The lady," said Star Daguay, "is an ornamental liar! As I told you a while ago, I got that film as soon as it was dry; I've had it ever since. There's never been a print made from it."

"That," said Jerry, "will need talking about." He considered a moment, and then added: "When do you go back to Sky Line?"

"My next show is at ten o'clock."

"I'll be at your apartment sometime before nine," he told her. . . .

He had his dinner that evening at a Greek restaurant in a back street. At about 8:45 he was ringing Daguay's bell in the hall of a new and very ugly apartment-house west of the river. Much to his surprise, a man's voice answered.

"Miss Daguay," said Jerry. "Tell her it's Mooney."

THERE was silence for a space, and then another voice said:

"O. K. Come up."

He ascended to the second floor, and knocked at the door of Apartment 14. The person who opened it was Captain Pash, of Police Headquarters, who looked at Jerry grimly through his gleaming glasses.

"Come in," said Pash. "Come right in: and start talking."

Jerry stepped into the room and looked around. He saw Engle, also of Headquarters, and two uniformed policemen.

"Looks like the place is being gone over," he said agreeably.

Pash did not like private operators in the police business; and he was especially opposed to Mooney. So he said:

"And well you know it. So let's hear what else you know—and without any side-talk."

"I've stopped in to see Miss Daguay," Jerry said. "A kind of appointment."

"Well," said Pash, "she's here; but I'm afraid, just now, she's not keeping any appointments."

Now Jerry knew Pash as the head of the homicide squad. And he

"What does Grat do but put Weathermore alongside me, with us both peeping over the fan."

"I desire to say a few words," Eberly said. Pash pointed to the chair. "Sit down."

knew Pash seldom appeared except at the first hour or two of a murder. He felt a sort of prickle along his scalp as he looked from the Captain to the set, heavy faces of the policemen.

"Daguay's not dead!" he said—but while the words were still forming on his tongue, he felt sure that she was.

"You know she is," said Pash. "You never move in anything, Mooney, without knowing where you're going."

"I believe," said Jerry, "this is the first time you ever gave me a credit that didn't belong to me." He nodded toward the closed door of an adjoining room. "Is she still here?"

The eyeglasses glittered from their place astride Pash's beak of a nose, and he grinned at Jerry unpleasingly.

"Don't start that little trick of yours, asking questions instead of answering them, for it's not going to get you anywhere tonight. What you're going to do now is state your business here, and nothing else."

Mooney knew Pash; and he also knew police methods. He had to talk; but, as usual, he only said what he must. He said that a few hours before, Stai Daguay had come into his office and asked him to do some investigating of a party named Roy Weathermore. At mention of this name, a look was exchanged between Pash and his man Engle. Jerry said he didn't hear much of the matter, for Roy Weathermore had come storming in, and Daguay left.

"And," said Jerry, "I came here this evening to get the rest of the story Miss Daguay had to tell."

"While Weathermore was there did he make any threats?"

"I didn't hear any," said Jerry, "and I usually listen for things like that. But he was very jumpy."

PASH asked a great many questions, but got little additional information; he was not at all satisfied.

"It might interest you," he said to Jerry, "that I've sent out word to pick this party up. He was here tonight. Two or three people saw him. Whatever was the cause of the row at your place, they renewed it here. And this,"—opening the inner door,—"is what happened."

Jerry stood in the doorway and saw the silent form of Stai Daguay stretched upon the floor. There was a dreadful wound in the head; the dried blood matted her blonde hair. And as Jerry looked at her there came a buzzing at the telephone. Pash took it up.

"Pash speaking." He listened for a moment or two, an expression of satisfaction on his face; then he put the telephone down.

"They've got him," he said. "He was at the Belmore, at dinner." Pash looked at Jerry. "Seems like it'll be a pretty easy case."

"Might be," said Jerry. "But you never can tell."

In a half hour, Jerry was at the Belmore, talking to the manager.

"But the police have already searched Weathermore's room," protested the man.

"Yeah, I know," said Jerry. "But they weren't looking for what I'll be looking for. The reason is that they

don't know it has anything to do with the case."

He'd spent a half hour in the apartment, with no success, when Engle of Headquarters appeared.

"We just had word you were here," said the Headquarters man. "And Pash wants to know what you're up to."

"Well, you see, Daguay had, to some extent, engaged me to do some work for her. And as it had to do with Weathermore, I thought I might as well put in a little time here looking."

"What'd you find?"

"Nothing," said Jerry truthfully. "Nothing like anything pointing any place at all."

"The regular cops were here before you," said Engle with a satisfied look. "And they usually do a clean job. But take another look before you leave, because we're going to have a man here for the next little while. So you'll not have another chance."

BUT Jerry said he'd seen all that interested him. He descended to the lower floor and at a booth telephone he called the home of Steve Curren, the assistant district attorney.

"They've got Weathermore at City Hall," said Jerry, after telling Curren what was necessary. "And just for the sake of fair play, I'd like to have a talk with him. I know Pash'll be against it, so I'd better arrive there all fixed up with something that'll go over his head."

In a short time Jerry had an authorization from Judge Anderson, and in spite of the protests of the police he was given a half hour with Roy Weathermore.

"The whole thing is nuts!" said the young man. "I know I was sore. I know I did a lot of talking and said some things I shouldn't have said. But as for killing Daguay, that's got nothing in it at all."

"But you did go to her apartment after you left my place?"

"I was drunk," said Weathermore. "After I left your office I stopped at a couple of bars and had maybe a half dozen. Then I went to Daguay's place and gave her to understand I wanted the film and any prints that had been made from it. There was a lot of talk, I know that; but what was said isn't clear to me. The only thing I recall is that she told me to get out; and that she'd telephone me tomorrow."

"But you didn't get the film?"

"No," said Weathermore reluctantly. "That thing's caused me trouble from the beginning. I was corned the night it was taken. Daguay had been putting the works on me for some time; she thought she saw money in me, and was trying to get it. The picture-taking business was a frame. It was supposed to be a joke. Grat Eberly, manager of the Sky Line, told me he had the film; he said he'd not have it used anywhere because he had to watch the reputation of the restaurant. But Daguay got hold of it afterward. She'd mention it once in a while, I think to let me know she had something on me. A couple of times I tried to get it from her, but she'd only laugh."

"Did Daguay, while you were at her place this evening, say anything about sending a print of the photograph to Eda Strom?"

"I must have mentioned it, because that's what made me go there. But if she said anything, I don't remember. You know," said Weathermore, "for the game she was playing, to send the picture to Eda was the very worst thing to do. Because it's Eda who really has the money, and all anybody can expect who reaches for Eda's pocketbook, is trouble."

After Jerry had left Police Headquarters he called the telephone company and got a department he'd contacted many times before.

"This is Mooney, Tommy," he said. "On a little business. I want to find out what calls there were at Star Daguay's apartment between the hours of six and eight tonight."

"What's Star been up to?" asked the voice on the other end. "She's getting to be a well-known lady."

"This time," said Jerry, "she's got herself murdered."

"No!" came the shocked exclamation.

"I'm looking into it a little," said Jerry. "If you'd get me any calls between those hours it might help."

"In a few minutes." Jerry waited, and then the voice sounded again. "Only one call in that period. That was from Pickering 8492."

"Many thanks," said Jerry. "That might lead somewhere."

He put down the telephone. Pickering 8492! Eda Strom's number! And at once he called the dancer's apartment-house and spoke to the caretaker.

"This is police," he said. "On the Daguay case. Did a lady call on Miss Daguay this evening, any time after she got home?"

"That I couldn't say. Captain Pash asked about visitors, and we could tell him very little. You see, we have no house-clerk here. You ring, and if the party says to come up, you tell the elevator boy what floor. He never knows who you're calling on. We only knew about this Weathermore tonight because he made so much noise."

There were several other calls after this, and short confidential talks. Then Jerry walked about town for a space. Finally he paused in front of the building upon the top of which the Sky Line restaurant was located. The express elevator took him up, and he strolled into the bar.

"A little bourbon, George," he said to the white-jacketed barkeeper. "Old Dad Simmons." The man put the bottle and glass before him. "How's business?"

The barkeeper shook his head.

"It's bad. This thing about Star Daguay will keep them away."

"How's Eberly taking it?"

"Tough. He must have his nails bitten down to the knuckles."

"I wonder if I could get a word with him?"

"I think not. There's someone in the office talking with him now."

Jerry drank the liquor, and stood looking at the empty glass.

"It'd be a woman," he said.

"It's always a woman with Eberly. Most of his trouble comes that way. This Star Daguay was never for this place. The money wasn't right for her. And he kept paying her more and more."

"He liked her, eh? Well, that's the way it goes." Jerry was silent for a moment. Then he said: "So you think I couldn't see him?"

"No; he gets sore if he's interrupted."

"I tried to get him on the telephone about 8:30," Jerry told the barkeeper.

"He was out at that time."

"Yeah. I guessed that," Jerry said, nodding his head.

After a few minutes he went to a telephone booth in the corridor and called Police Headquarters.

"Is that you, Berg?"

"Hello, Jerry. Want something?"

"How's the old man fixed for time?"

"He's on this Daguay case; but I'll ask him."

IN a few moments Pash, in his usual ugly humor, spoke.

"I'm up to my neck, Mooney," he said. "So, of course, you must crowd in on me."

"What I'm thinking of doing," said Jerry cheerfully, "is give you a helping hand."

"I'll not be needing it," said Pash. "I've got the party I want. And in the next hour I'll have the truth out of him."

"Give a listen to what I have to say," Jerry said, "and maybe you'll save yourself an hour's work."

"What is it?" asked Pash crabbedly, but with interest in his voice.

"Get a cab, right away; and come to the Sky Line. There's something cooking here that you'll be interested in."

"In the case of the fan dancer?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there, said Pash.

"Head right for the office," said Jerry. "That's where you'll find me."

"And there had better be something," Pash warned him. "I know you put over a nice thing once in a while; but I never like the way you hold onto facts until the last minute."

JERRY passed along the corridor, opening a door which bore the word *Office* on a glass panel. Grat Eberly, proprietor and manager of the Sky Line, sat at a desk. He was a big man with a quick eye and a harsh expression. The look he fixed on Jerry as he appeared was none too friendly. But Jerry smiled agreeably.

"Pardon," he said. He looked at a girl who sat beside Eberly's desk—a beautiful girl with dazzling white skin and an aloof, superior manner. "I'd no idea you were engaged."

"It's the custom to knock," said Eberly irritably.

"So it is," said Jerry in his most amiable manner. "But in my business I've knocked at so many doors without results I seldom think of doing it any more." He smiled at the girl. "I'm a private cop," he said. "The name's Mooney."

The girl's expression changed; she looked steadily at him, but said nothing.

"What'll you have?" asked Eberly. "I'm busy just now."

"I thought I'd drop in about this Star Daguay matter. Remember, you called me about that, along about five o'clock. She came in not long afterward: about a photograph taken here, of herself and Roy Weathermore."

"Suppose," said Eberly, "we take that up at another time."

Jerry saw the eyes of the girl still fixed on him; and he said to Eberly:

"There ought to be something said. This blackmail thing is dangerous. If the police get hold of it, they may try to fit it to the murder."

Eberly fidgeted in his chair.

"I wish Star hadn't gone to you about this photograph controversy," he said. "Of course it had nothing to do with her death"—and he looked at the girl—"but, as you suggest, it could be used as evidence against Weathermore."

"It could turn out to be a wicked piece of business," said Jerry. "But it should be discussed. There's another party coming in," he told Eberly. "I just telephoned him."

"Coming here?" And the man looked at Mooney from under knotted brows.

"It'll be Pash. You know, of the police," said Jerry, easily. "I thought I'd ask him in to listen. You know, he enjoys things like this."

Eberly got out of his chair.

"Now listen to me," he said. "I agree with you about not going too far into this matter—and I mean now or at any other time. Star Daguay is dead: so why should this thing be brought up against her? And, as Roy Weathermore is in trouble, why should it be brought up against him?" He looked at the girl. "For it is against him that it will be used—as a reason for the murder."

The girl turned to Jerry; and he could see that she was trembling. He said to Eberly:

"I don't think it'll hurt Roy much. And it'll have to be told in the end; nothing can prevent that."

Eberly sat down once more, as footsteps sounded in the corridor.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Jerry said, "if that was Pash now."

It was not only Pash, but Engle was at his heels.

"All right," said the Captain, glancing from one to the other. "What's it about? Let me have it quick. I haven't much time."

"You know Eberly," said Jerry. "And this"—indicating—"is Miss Eda Strom, fiancée of Roy Weathermore."

Then as Mooney drew a quick word-picture of the matter that had brought Star Daguay to his office that afternoon, Pash's eyes snapped.

"Blackmail!" he snapped. "Well, that about clinches the case against Weathermore. Daguay tried to shake him down; he went to her apartment to get the film; she wouldn't turn it over, and he killed her."

"Hot stuff!" said Engle admiringly.

"A thing I always try not to do," said Jerry, "is shoot before I've got the gun loaded. Suppose"—to Pash—"you listen while we unroll a few things."

"You asked me to come here," said Pash, "and here I am."

Jerry then addressed himself to the girl.

"Miss Strom, you've heard that in conversations Star Daguay had with Roy Weathermore she mentioned she was holding this piece of film at a price?"

"Yes, Roy told me that."

"Did he say what the price was?"

"No. I learned what the price was, from a letter that was sent me."

"A letter written by Star Daguay?"

"No, it was written by Mr. Eberly."

Eberly arose.

"I desire to say a few words," he said huskily.

Pash pointed to the chair.

"Sit down," he said.

"Was a price named in Eberly's letter?" asked Mooney.

"Ten thousand dollars."

"When I was told about that letter," said Mooney to Pash, "I arranged with Miss Strom to make this visit to Eberly." He nodded to the girl. "Tell the Captain what took place after you got here."

"I told Mr. Eberly that I'd received the letter he sent some three or four days ago," said Eda Strom. "I also said that I'd meant to ignore it; but the way things were, with Roy in the hands of the police, I thought I'd better do something. I told Mr. Eberly the price he asked for the film was very high; and he said"—with a look of contempt at the manager of the Sky Line—"that he might take less, but it wouldn't be much less."

"That's a lie!" shouted Eberly.

"Let's have more quiet," said Engle, tapping him on the shoulder. "There's a lady talking."

"I'll take over for a while now," said Jerry to Pash. "I've heard, both from Daguay and from Weathermore, that the taking of the fan photograph was supposed to be a joke: Weathermore said it was on him, and Daguay said it was on her. But both said the joker was Eberly. Anyway, it was Eberly who got the film."

"I had it," said Eberly excitedly, "but Star got it away from me."

"That part of it could be true," said Mooney to Pash. "For she told me she had it. But her story was she never meant to give the picture to the papers; also that she'd never had a print made from the film. All she meant to do was talk, and try to squeeze a little money out of somebody."

"Well," said Pash, "what does all that add up to?"

"My thought is this," said Jerry: "Eberly and Daguay meant blackmail, at the start. They framed it together."

"I deny that!" said the manager of the Sky Line. "There's no truth in it."

"But afterward," Jerry went on, "Daguay got the idea she'd like to marry Weathermore. So she got possession of the film to keep Eberly from using it. Later still, when she found Roy was engaged to Miss Strom, and that it was Miss Strom who really had the money, she revived the blackmail idea—but with only herself in it."

Jerry looked at Eberly and proceeded:

"You got wind of that. You often visited Star Daguay at her apartment; and so when the chance came on one of these occasions, the film changed hands once more."

"THAT'S not true. This man's framing me!" shouted Eberly.

"You got the film somehow," said Jerry. "We've got to remember you sent a print of it to Miss Strom. I've been asking around about you," continued Jerry. "About how you stood financially. I found you were very shaky—that you owed everybody, as the saying is. And that could very well be one of the reasons why you

wanted the film. Another one being that you'd heard Star was trying to double-cross you in the matter.

"Up to the time I spoke to Star Daguay on the telephone late this afternoon," Jerry said to Pash, "she believed she had the film. She must have looked for it, found it was gone, knew it was Eberly who'd taken it and called him, demanding that he come out there right away."

Pash turned to Eberly.

"You must have got there right after Weathermore had gone," he said.

"I didn't go there! I haven't been there for weeks!" shouted Eberly.

Pash nodded to Engle, who took the man by the arm.

"We'll be going now," said Pash. "Anything you care to say can be said at Headquarters."

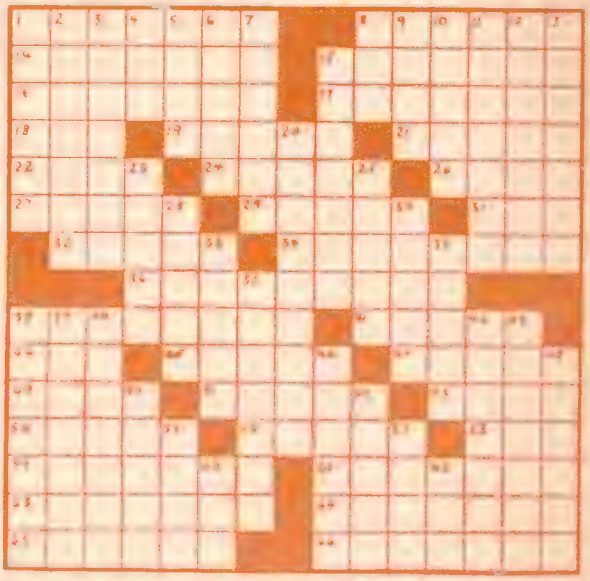
"I HAD it worked out pretty well," Jerry told his secretary next morning as he was looking over the mail. "Pash worked on Eberly until he made him talk, and what he said was right along the line I'd been following. I had been thinking of Weathermore. He could have been the party, you know. And afterward Strom stayed in my mind for a while. But after I'd heard Eberly was on financial rocks and that his name was on the letter sent to Strom, I knew he was the principal guy.

"He told Pash that Daguay telephoned him after she found the film was missing. And that she meant to turn him in for blackmail. He went to her apartment, just as I'd figured it out; and he tried to talk her into another frame of mind. But she wasn't to be smoothed, as he soon found out. She picked up the telephone to call the police, and he snatched it out of her hand. Then she ran to the door to alarm the house; he grabbed her. When she struggled and fought him, he struck her. He said that when he left the room he didn't know she was dead. But whether that's the truth or not is a thing none of us will ever know."

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

IN these puzzles the definitions combine a true synonym of the word with a clue to the spelling of the word; but the phrasing of synonym and clue is intentionally misleading. The trick of solving is to disregard the apparent meaning and try to figure out which part of the definition is synonym and which part is clue. For example, anagrams: "Pieces of eight" defines *specie,* of which word *pieces* is an anagram. Hidden words spell out the defined word as parts of other words: *Hid each plan"* defines *idea.* The enigma type of definition plays on the syllables in a word: "I put in ad for help" is *aid,* since "I" is put into "ad." Puns, backward spellings, and straight dictionary definitions are also used. (Solution on page 70.)

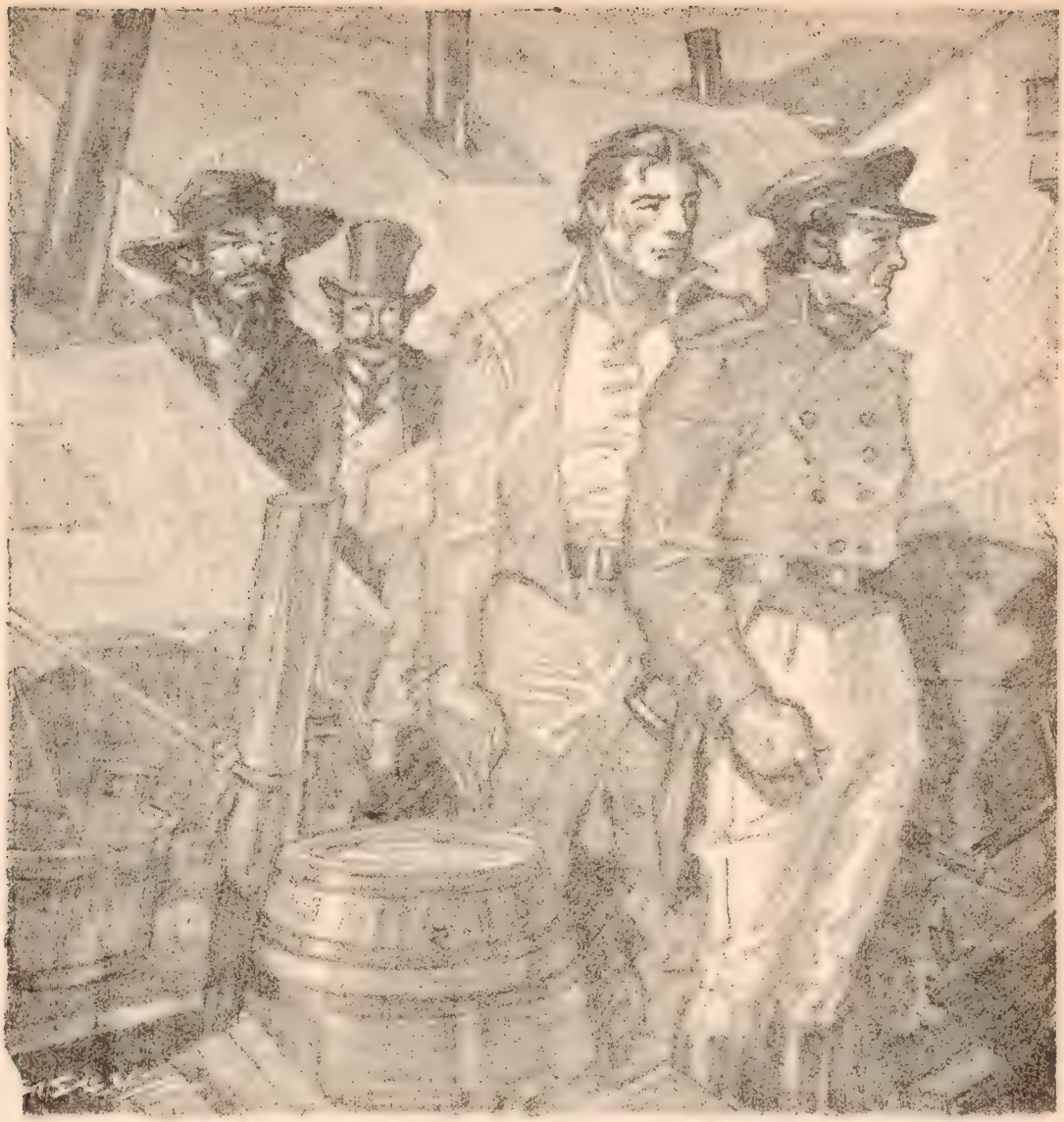


ACROSS

1 Progress and ——, by George
8 Capers to make the steep slope
14 Concoction of recipe takes you in as a gourmet
15 Old-fashioned hairdresser made 'er rabid
16 Curly, Moe and Larry change, get so-so
17 Cattle a requirement to make milk?
18 Keep the fires lit "—— we meet again"
19 Uncle Sam bashful, hides during Brazilian dance
21 I mess things done by halves
22 Lo, you'll find, af is better than none
24 Runs, without a tie, among the tardiest
26 The Assn. must do without
27 Dissenter will finally join
29 The aspen, aquiver in the spring tides
31 Nay, in Scotland
32 Withers, going back and forth
34 Cuckoo got married, which made him active
36 Lancaster the home of his forefathers
38 *Le claret* filled the sideboard
41 Make a stand in Crete
44 Examiner finds weapon near miner
45 Lid clamped down on Ur, the sensational
47 Makes sure, straightens the *rue*-St. mix-up
49 "Native caviar" adds dash
51 Ibsen produces a play on the main stems
53 Clementine ends in the river's fork
54 Town in Piedmont, reduced to an ounce
56 Get 'er a bird for a feather in her cap
58 The ad's making me doleful
59 Names Ed to make reparations
61 Pressing heatedly
63 Just deserts sometimes are very sweet
64 A modern Cyrano and comic daunter
65 Compounds used for perfumes, flavors &c.
66 If S were you, she could become supreme (in the empire)

DOWN

1 Druggist's mortar-pounder will almost make pellets
2 Choices among potions
3 Trespass to get a violet
4 College economics
5 These are frequently hooked, while having naps
6 "—— lightly, she is near." *Wilde*
7 He ratifies eagerly what other men say
8 The lit'ry will become literary with a new epoch
9 Bags some Injun braves
10 Remarks that I left the cities
11 First man, then the termite coming the hard way
12 Instruments of vision
13 Result of 61 across
15 Noisy explosion of a TNT lab
20 Bring around the East, bravely facing it
23 Savage confused by a flare
25 How many peris can dance on a steeple-point?
28 Pertaining to the kidneys
30 Be stung when you trade in marts
33 Curbs a mess with this mop
35 The air-raid alarm knocked the malapert off the map
37 The Erie arrived exactly in E. S. T.—most uncanny
38 Cad comes into the case to take the fall
39 Causes a hum among his exes when he digs up the body
40 Sent ale to fill the thinnest ones
42 Is in, wrapped up in cue for food preparation
43 The occupants are ten insects
46 Get goat and ride, Ed
48 G! Seeds grow grasslike plants
50 Needs are growing heavy
52 Muser about vaccine
55 Rode the German river
57 In brief, a tin fish landed to port
60 GBS: Shaw:: *x:* Stettinius
62 The ancient Nera, tributary of the Tiber



A STORY OF THE OLD WILD CALIFORNIA: OF A SAILOR WHO HAD JUMPED SHIP FOR THE GOLD-FIELDS; OF A GIRL WHO HAD BEEN BORN AT EIGHT-BELLS AND WHO THEREFORE COULD SEE GHOSTS; AND OF THE YOUNG CAPTAIN FARRAGUT WHO BECAME A GREAT ADMIRAL.

The Sailor

SEVEN miners from the gold-placers got off the Sacramento River boat at Mare Island. Six went into a saloon; one went to see a palmist. This last, Slim Lagard, had two rawhide pokes under his vest which he intended to deposit in Billy Ralston's Bank of California at San Francisco. Three years' panning was long enough, although his hoard was small due to his indulgence in faro, skewball black and Crack Lou.

He found the palmist's tent across the Napa River in a camp of pole houses where sailors from the square-riggers, steam packets and sloops-of-war anchored off the Island came to gamble. Slim Lagard was astonished to find a girl not yet twenty who looked no more like a seeress of the Gold Rush country than he did. Except for her gaudy shawl, she might have been any prim little churchgoer walking down Johnny Cake Hill back in New Bedford. She had a flounced black mull dress and hair that was of the softness of a mouse-colored burro's. But there was that red shawl on which she had pinned sheriffs' stars, dried scorpions and vinegaroons to represent the signs of the Zodiac: that, and her eyes, served to mark her.

Her eyes, as a deckhand on the Sacramento riverboat said, showed that she had been born at eight bells and hence could see ghosts. It meant no such thing, Lagard grunted to himself as he stared at her. The haunted look was her memory of what had happened when she crossed the Plains. Slim heard about this from the miners

and the Seeress

by Kenneth Perkins

at the placers. She had seen her father and mother killed by Arapahoes in '49. This she did not see as an hallucination through a crystal, but through the back of a covered wagon, actually and starkly. Being half-starved—they had taken the "Fool's Cut-off" across the Great American Desert—she was especially impressionable at the time. Besides, she was on the borderline between a child and woman, being but twelve—and her father and mother represented all of her world and life. . . .

While he gaped at her she was studying him, according to her professional routine.

It was hard to guess a man's past in those days, for any barkeeper might be a banker or a doctor bucking his luck. For example, the fierce-looking Captain Farragut here at Mare Island was a cultured gentleman who could speak Italian and French and Arabic. Orissa herself, supposed to have a Hopi witch-doctor's blood in her veins, was really the daughter of a Boston deacon and tinsmith.

Now this client standing in front of her tent table was lanky and loose-jointed and blushing. His flop-brimmed hat might have been used for panning; his leather vest and buckskin pants could mean a road-agent or his long fingers, a card-sharp; and the knotted joints and tattooed heart might mean he was a sailor who had jumped ship, as thousands had, for the gold-fields.

For a moment she was noncommittal. "Are you just looking at me, pilgrim?"

He stacked some four-bit pieces on the table with the shrug of a gambler willing to buck a crooked wheel. "Let's hear my fortune." His tone was as much as to say: "The idea of a little sagehen like you thinking you've got powers beyond human!"

"Sit on the barrel there, while I look into the crystal and the future."

She did not look into the crystal; she looked at him. He wiped his forehead. Then her eyes dropped suddenly to the ball of transparent quartz on the table.

"When you go to sea next," she said, "I advise you to keep a pinch of salt in your pocket, because I see contrary winds."

"I'm not going to sea. I'm going to buy some land in the Santa Rosa Valley up Sonoma way."

SHE nodded stiffly, trying to cover her mistake. "That's better. You must give up the sea, even though you were born for it."

"You think I'm one of these fellows building the Navy Yard shacks across the river," he said with a long-lipped grin. "I don't belong to the Navy, never did and never will. Look, let *me* tell *your* fortune."

He reached for the ball and she drew back, startled. "You came from Down East, same as I did," he said. "When you were still a spindly-legged kid, something happened which cut you off from your past. It made you feel lost so you didn't know which way to drift—or to escape. You got to be like a fugitive who goes into a crowded honkytonk, say, and sizes up everybody fast. Or maybe, since you knew the cards were stacked against you, you got the gambler's knack of looking for the bat of an eye or the twist of a mouth. You guess a man's future that way. But as for seeing miracles in this ball, I'm a Mojave if you're not human, same as I am!"

"If you knew all this, what's that stack of four-bit pieces for?"

"Just so I can take a little of your time and look at you."

"You've taken as much time as that pays for, pilgrim, so now you'd better go away."

He took out a gold-poke, but she shook her head. "You better go before that storm breaks I told you about. That much of your future I'm giving free."

He was looking at the ball intently, so intently that he pretended not to hear. "By japers—there's something to this! A mist smoking around like a tule fog. I can see a ranch up in the Santa Rosa Valley—vineyards, a grove, a little gray shack with a trellis and hops, a creek and cottonwoods, and you sitting in the *emparrada*. Now I'll tell you what your husband looks like."

"Not that I care, but a man outside this tent listening, might."

Slim said recklessly: "I see a lanky rannihan in a hickory shirt, his hand tattooed by a Jap in Frisco. Looks like a hand that's worked three years in the placers."

"All right, we're both fakes," the girl said. "The crystal's a cold deck. Only I wasn't far wrong in calling you a sailor, for no other manner of man works this fast." She shoved his stack of coins back to him. "I'm a fraud and you're a sea-lawyer, so you may as well keep your money."

"If I met you in Frisco, just by luck, I'd show you the town."

"I've seen Frisco."

"All right, you show me the town. I could meet you on Portsmouth Square at the Parker House, just by luck."

"Luck's forsaken lots of men at the Parker House."

"If you mean someone would object to us being together—"

"You could take care of yourself, you were going to say. With a—"

"With my hands—or perhaps a knife. I could take care of us both."

"The Vigilantes put a man in that fort on Sacramento Street for stabbing, even though he's a State judge. You don't happen to see a rope in that crystal, pilgrim?"

"A little quarrel brewing here?" a voice said behind Slim's shoulder.

Slim Lagard turned to face a thick-necked man in a velvet coat.

"No quarrel," said Slim. "A matter of love and our future life. Or does that mean a quarrel with somebody?"

"The Navy Yard has warned me Orissa must peddle only prognostications, nothing else."

"I'm not working in the Navy Yard. Any other objections?"

"Not this time; but next, friend."

"The next time will be tomorrow. And every day after that."

"And is there nothing that you can think of that might put a stop to the procession of days?"

Slim Lagard said, looking down at the ashen-faced girl: "When she says she'll go to Frisco with me."

"I wouldn't like that," the man said.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"She's my ward. My wife and I adopted her, crossing the Plains. My wife died. I'm the only guardian she has: which reminds me, I happened to overhear that you have a propensity for using a knife." He took out a horse pistol.

LAGARD chuckled at the obvious bluff and then slipped a knife from its sheath. They looked at each other genially. Don Jack Haden, who owned the tent show, smiled from one sideburn to the other. The smile stiffened, giving the appearance of petrified redwood. He said: "Not now, friend. But next time."

Stalking out unhurriedly, Slim went to a saloon where a group of hard-knuckled, whiskered men were drinking brandy squashes. These were the six miners who had come down with him from Placerville, which in those days was called Hangtown. They sat in a back room, hobnail-booted feet on a table, black wool shirts open, their pipes puffing impatiently. To them Slim Lagard announced what had happened at the palmist's tent.

"I made love to her like you told me to," he said. "Then this Don Jack Haden drew on me with a gun. All I needed to call his bluff was a knife."

The miners puffed and chewed on this. The youngest of them—he was so young that his beard was still a fuzz—said: "Bluff or no, he opened the jackpot the same way he did with Al Sinko."

"If he was the one who murdered Sinko, the girl doesn't know anything about it," Slim said. "She *couldn't* know anything about it or she would not stay with him. She's younger than we thought, and she's no hurrah girl either."

A red-bearded miner spoke up. "Did we send you to find out whether the girl was hunky, or whether Don Jack murdered our pardner?"

THE oldest miner went out and came back with a big-boned, leather-faced man who wore a Vigilante badge on his left lapel.

Slim looked up, surprised. "Kind of early to call a Committeeman to sit in, aint it?"

"Mr. Murgatroyd, express agent here at Vallejo," the old miner said, introducing the newcomer. "This here is Slim Lagard; he worked up in the washings with Al Sinko, same as all of us. Slim, you tell him."

"It's like this," Slim said. "Al Sinko stopped here a while back and fell for this palmist. He was a young kid, a good looker and always homesick, but he never took to these cantina girls motherin' him. He picked a girl that was straight, and that much of his story I can vouch for."

"Forget the girl, Slim, and stay in the right chute," said the red-bearded one.

"They warned Al Sinko to stay away," Slim continued. "He came back and got beaten up. That was according to Hoyle, maybe. Al was a fightin' ranny and given to liquor, so we thought nothing about it. But he told us about the girl: said she was really being held prisoner by this man Don Jack."

They looked at each other genially. Don Jack Haden said: "Not now, friend. But next time."

"'Prisoner' don't sound right," the Vigilante objected. "Things don't happen that way."

"That's why we didn't listen much to poor Al. But he said this Don Jack had fixed it so she didn't want to leave him or get married—said he'd promised to get her on the stage down at the American at Frisco."

"We can't hang him for that," said the Vigilante. "Wish we could."

"Al Sinko went back again with horses and two guns. Said he'd call a showdown. We never heard of him again."

"Until he was found in the tules with his skull bashed in," the Vigilante said, nodding. "We never connected that up with Don Jack. But you gents have a good hand to fill to." He measured Slim through pipe-smoke. "Want to take another pasear over there and see what happens?"

Slim assented eagerly.

The miners laughed. "If they try roughing Slim it'll be too bad."

"It'll prove enough on Don Jack for us to bring him to trial," said the Vigilante. "Better go heeled."

Slim shook his head. "That'd stop their play, besides scaring the girl." He got up. "I'll go prospect her."

When he walked over to Don Jack's layout, the dealers stood at tent doors watching him from under green eyeshades. Their steady dragging at cigarettes said eloquently that they were merely letting him come closer. They even let him get inside the palmist's booth.

Orissa sat behind her table, poker-faced except for her eyes which had grown larger.

"Who's doing the fortune-telling this time?" she asked.

He took up the crystal. He spoke so fervently that he surprised himself. He had come here pretending to make love and suddenly found no effort in the pretense. "You've got a job that makes money," he said, "not for you but for your employer. You're his best drawing-card. That's why he's your guardian—so he can salt away what you earn, but in his own jeans. He'll see to it that no one takes you away from him. He doesn't make the mistake of having your lovers killed in the open, because he'd tangle with the Vigilantes. He just has his men work 'em over."

"And still you come here, knowing what's in store for you?"

"Sometimes his gang don't measure their blows, and a man is killed—maybe by accident."

THE mockery left her face. "What sort of lies are you making up?"

"Course you *think* you can fall in love with any man you choose. But you're afraid of what Don Jack will do; everything you've told me shows you're scared to death of him. You've held back your dislike for him with a Spanish bit—because you think he took the place of your father. You think you can leave him any time you want. But where can a homeless girl go in this woolly country—except to the Frisco honkytonks? It stacks up to this: you're a prisoner."

Slim heard a noise behind the tent—a rustle of dry straw like a trade rat. He gave a start. And then saw the girl's face drain of all color.

"There are four of them waiting for you," she said. "Don't go out the way you came. Crawl through here when I tell you." She pointed to the side flap.

"Thanks," he said.

But he got up, preferring to walk out rather than crawl. He stepped to the door, giving one last glance over his shoulder, which showed her with her two fists against her mouth, stifling a cry. Then she pointed frantically to one side of him—the side from which the first blow would come.

He ducked it when he went out, so that the wagon felly missed his head but sent him sprawling at the girl's feet. A man in a frock coat—one of Don Jack's dealers—jumped in, kicking and stamping on him. In Slim's daze the stamp of Congress boots merged to the sound of hoofbeats as a man galloped his horse up from the river road.

"It's the Captain!" Don Jack called huskily from outside the tent. "Cut this ruckus!"

This was the Captain from Mare Island, a man of Spanish blood named Farragut. He checked his horse to a walk as he saw a bloody-faced scarecrow stagger out of the tent, splintering the palmist's table on the head of one man, and knocking down another with what looked like a flutter of playing-cards; the third he struck on the jaw so that there was the sound of crunching bone. He started to chase a fourth, but the Captain shoved his horse in the way

When Slim looked up he saw the horseman's face like two in one, for a Satanic scowl and a gentle smile were superimposed one on the other.

When the Captain dismounted he had to look up at Slim, for he was under average height—a hard chunk of a man who, as is known, loved a fight against big odds.

"You ought to be in the Navy," he snapped.

Slim stood in the midst of strewn bodies. His gaze slipped sheepishly to the girl who was staring at him.

She said: "Maybe you'll tell the Captain I warned you not to come—even though the crystal showed nothing of how you can fight!" She turned to help the nearest groaning man.

"You see, Captain, it was like this—" Slim began.

"I saw what it was like." The Captain looked over at Don Jack, who had removed his beaver hat and was smiling uncertainly. "These men lying on the ground," the Captain said, "remind me that you used to put on bear-baits in San Francisco. Chaining a bear and a bull together and letting them tear themselves to pieces is very much like what you've done here."

Two of the men were dragging themselves off; another lay cold while the girl wiped the blood from his head.

"Just a little altercation, Captain," Don Jack wheedled. "This fellow—a Frisco hound, I'd venture to say—has been bothering my palmist, a young and helpless lady."

Orissa looked up. "Carlos, Tipo—whichever of you isn't too mangled, bring some whisky."

The Captain looked at Slim from head to foot. "I ought to have you flogged at the end of a main buntline, but when I see the stakes you fought for, I can't blame you—I blame her."

The girl got up with a gasp of indignation. But he went on steadily: "I've had complaints about the brawling in this concession. Commander Boutwell of the *John Adams* tells me his sailors are in a continual turmoil, and that the innocent cause is a very attractive young woman. This must be rectified."

Don Jack asked, smoothing his beaver hat: "Would you have me discharge the girl, in a country where fortune-hunters from Boston to Peru and Panama would pounce on her?"

"If she were married, there would be an end to the pouncing," the Captain said shrewdly. "Obviously she must get many offers. She should accept one. On board the *Warren* we have our families, but the womenfolk are not without their protectors."

"Don Jack is my protector," the girl said, "in case it is any of your affair."

"My sailors are my affair. I'll have no unmarried girl—one as charming as you are—causing any more trouble in my command." He stepped into his saddle. "Until I hear you've picked yourself a husband or else moved on, there'll be a standing order that no sailor from Mare Island enter these pole houses." He gave Slim a scowl and pointed to the road.

"Maybe the order won't have to stand long, Captain," Slim laughed as he started off.

When he got back to the Vallejo cantina he found that three more Committeemen had joined Al Sinko's avengers. Rage filled the cardroom at sight of Slim's bloody face.

"Pretty near ended up in the tules," one of the Committeemen said, shoving a can of cigars across the table.

"The thing will bear investigating," Slim said.

There was silence.

"Come on, men," one man said.

"Wait a minute," Slim said. "That girl's gun-shy—don't let her see what's going to happen. This Don Jack's the same as a dad to her."

"She'll be getting herself a new dad directly," a miner grunted.

The oldest said cautiously: "Have we got proof enough even now?"

"A trial will bring more proof to light," a Committeeman retorted. "Better go get a lariat, Mack."

"Let me go there first," Slim said. "I'll take two ponies, and get the girl off somewhere."

The crowded saloon was noisy with growling, but one Committeeman agreed grimly: "It's a humane play. Take two of our ponies, Lagard. We'll follow you, walking."

SLIM belted on his gun for the first time—a single-percussion pistol invented by a man named Derringer. He took two saddled horses from the hitching-rail outside, and rode at a slow jog to the *baile* tents.

The dealers and mozos scurried for cover. Slim caught barely a flash of the girl's fire-colored shawl as she whisked from the door of the tent where she was standing, into the sanctum of her fortune-teller's booth. He kept an eye on the other pole houses, although he was fairly sure Don Jack would not risk a shoot-out.

When he slid from his horse in front of her tent and went in, he was nettled at the calm level look she gave him across the pattern of cards. A canvas-top table had replaced the one he had smashed.

"You came as a road agent this time, looks like," she said, eying his holster.

He spoke gently, knowing of her innate horror of bloodshed—a horror that went back to that childhood day.

"The pistol's for Don Jack's men, not to force your hand."

"What else do you call it, coming with two saddle-horses?"

"An invitation to the Santa Rosa Valley."

"If you packed me off against my will—"

"It won't be like that."

"I see little of my own future; yours is clearer, Captain. Some day you will be an Admiral."

"If I got on one of your horses, willingly or not, what do you think Don Jack would be doing?"

"Taking the stretch out of a rope." Slim wanted to point through the door at the crowd of men coming up from the shacks of Vallejo. But instead he said: "Remember a young pocket-hunter called Al Sinko?"

She had to think. "Yes—Al Sinko. He tried what you're trying. Only he wasn't as good a fighter as you."

"The body they found in the tules was Al Sinko. And he was my pard."

Her eyes glared wildly; she shook her head in a vague lost way that could not have been play-acting. Then the clatter of hobnailed boots shook her out of her daze and Slim turned to the tent door. She followed him. Dust mingled with tule fog and out of the dust a dozen shuffling men loomed.

The girl clutched Slim's arm and fell to her knees. She could see well enough that some of the men wore the Vigilante badge. "What are they going to do with him?"

"If you don't want to see it, we can take these two ponies and slope out of here."

"You mean they'll try him for that murder? No! They can't do that! I know their trials—they'll hang him! They—" She was incoherent. "I saw it before—my own father killed, and my mother. It's the same thing happening again! If you meant anything you said to me—"

She checked herself in sudden consternation. Was it possible that he had not meant a word of it?

Slim lifted her up, and her body —without apparent weight or bone— had a sudden passionate strength as she fought away from him.

"I didn't want the showdown to come this way," he said. "I told them to wait till I took you off somewhere. But these Committeemen won't wait. Unless—"

He stood a moment as the men strung out and surrounded the main tent where Don Jack and his men stood flabbergasted. Don Jack's eyes bulged from the purple fat of his face. He was too stunned to give an order to his men, or even draw. His hands went up when the first man of the posse walked up to him. The dealers and mozos stood at one side of the tent, huddled together like sheep.

Slim walked into the middle of it. "This button's my prisoner," he said "The rest of you gents keep back."

The Committeemen gasped. "What are you talking about? Thought it was you got up this party, Lagard!"

"Sure Al Sinko was like a brother to me. For three years we rode and tied together. I'm settling his score without benefit of posse."

THE miners grinned slowly. It was the way Slim Lagard would want the game rolled, they knew that. But the Vigilantes bristled. One of them said, "You're spreading a pretty big loop, Lagard; we don't give up prisoners that easy. Who the Sam Hill do you think you're talking to?"

"To a Citizens' Committee that hasn't as much right to lynch this man as I have."

"*Right,* you call it? We've shown how much right we've got to try a man, any man. We put a State judge in jail down in Frisco, and a Federal agent besides. And we kicked ex-Governor McDougall out of the State. And yet a cool-headed seedwart like you sets yourself against a Vigilante posse!"

Slim drew his gun, and from the skirts of Don Jack's coat he drew another. "You Vigilantes go back to Frisco and Fort Gunnybags. Your law's no good here, even though I'm thanking you for offering. This man's going to hang, but I'm taking him where he'll get a trial first."

The leading Committeeman unholstered a gun, but one of the miners reached for him. "Don't try that!"

The youngest miner stopped a second Vigilante. "We're telling you, gents! Don't try any shoot-out with Slim!"

The Committeemen looked at each other in blank frustration. They seemed to be counting their badges and then counting the miners. "Are you muckers letting this kid blowfly up this-a-way, or are you backing us?"

"We aint tangling horns with Slim," the oldest miner said. "If just you four with badges want to try it, go ahead. He already beat a four-to-one combination today."

"Besides which," the red-headed miner said, "he aint going to let Don Jack go—don't think that!"

Slim took the moment's advantage. "All right, you!" He prodded Don Jack's fat ham with his knee. "Scramble onto this pony."

"Where you taking him, Slim?" a miner asked.

"To the only law that's left anywhere in San Francisco Bay. I'm taking him to Mare Island, to see Captain Farragut."

As Slim jumped the two horses into a gallop, the four men who wore badges stared dumfounded. One of them choked: "I'll be damned for a row of horned toads! Why, even Governor McDougall didn't dast talk to us that way!"

When Captain Farragut had the prisoner stowed safely in the *Warren's* brig, he asked Slim Lagard into his cabin. The Captain sat behind his desk on which there was a Bible, an Arabic lexicon and a sheaf of reports he was writing to Secretary Dobbin at Washington. The light of the Argand lamp, swinging from a deck beam, turned the tropic pallor of his face to a brighter yellow as he looked up, scowling.

"It occurs to me," he said to Slim, "that while justice is taking its course —thanks to you—someone who is totally innocent will suffer most."

"I know who you mean. She'll take it the right way, knowing it's in the cards."

"Nevertheless she will be homeless."

"She has a way out."

"Not the *baile* houses of San Francisco, I hope." He looked at Slim craftily. "As I understand this thing, from what I've just heard, you went to her to substantiate the story that no one could make love to her without being brutally attacked."

"That will come out in the trial for what it's worth."

"Then you just pretended you were in love?" His smile was Mephistophelian as well as benign.

Slim looked cornered. "All right. I went there pretending; then I got cross-fissured on my own drift."

"She just came aboard to see what was going to befall this damned landsman, Don Jack. I asked her to wait before going ashore, so I could talk to her." He sent a bluejacket for Orissa.

When she came in, she looked at Slim from under the flowered brim of a leghorn bonnet, its broad ribbon tied under her chin. She said, so softly she could scarcely be heard: "Thanks, pilgrim."

The Captain watched them during the ensuing silence; then he said, his eyes studying the girl: "I understand that you have some fame and name for advising men when the time is propitious to bet on certain colors. Now this fellow here is a reckless gambler and might profit by your continual advice. Alone, he is a hellion and without ballast. Look! I know what it means to take a prisoner from the clutches of the Vigilantes. I am writing a report to Washington about how I did it." He pointed to the papers on his table. "When I went down to San Francisco to rescue Judge Terry, I took this vessel and the *Decatur* and the *John Adams* and the schooner *Fenimore Cooper* to back me up—whereas this triple-plated hellbender did it single-handed."

"If he needs my advice," she said, "he can come to the palmist tent now without being molested."

"Not across the river. Those tents will be closed up because of today's events. So where will you pitch your tent now?"

She looked lost for a moment, for obviously she had nowhere to go. She was back once again at the Fool's Cut-off. Then she took the crystal ball from the folds of her red shawl. "I still have this to tell me.'

The Argand lamp filled the quartz with a moving glow like a sunshot tule fog.

Slim Lagard snorted. "She knows the thing's a fake. It's a trick. There's nothing in it."

He took this attitude, the Captain reflected, because he was in love; and any miraculous clairvoyance or intuition in a man's mate can not be countenanced.

"That ball is a thing of the devil," said the Captain to her, "but if in any way it will show you where you will find your next home, I would like to hear."

She held the glass up before the soft blaze of her eyes. "I can see little of my own future; but yours is clearer, Captain. Some day you will be made an Admiral."

"We have no Admirals in this Navy."

She looked crestfallen, but in her profession she was resourceful. "You, David Farragut, may be the first one. I do not have to trust the crystal. I see it in your eyes and your mouth and in the understanding you have of fighting-men."

SLIM gave another snort of laughter. So did the Captain. "All of us naval officers have that in the back of our minds. Nothing clairvoyant about that."

"Admiral Farragut!" Slim laughed. "That's a good one! Don't let her hornswoggle you, Captain."

"I'll go to my Bible for my prophecies as I do every time before fighting my ships," the Captain said. "But as for you, and as for this young bruiser—can you hazard no guess?"

She gave the same vague shake of her head that Slim had seen before.

"It's too foggy in the crystal," she said softly. "But there's a rift far off —a place like the Santa Rosa Valley."

The WALL of FIRE

A Twice-told Tale from our July, 1932, issue.

by John M. Kirkland

IT was St. Louis and it was summer; and although it was afternoon, Bennett's day was just beginning. His wife had followed him into the hallway outside their rooms. He took her into his arms.

"Good-by, Anne."

Her hand trailed off his sleeve.

"Hurry home," she said. "I'll be wanting you. There's cold chicken and things. I'll have supper ready."

He kissed her. She had a curious, crooked little smile that expressed her hope.

"If it's quiet, they might be letting you come home early."

He considered. "Maybe. Yes, they might if nothing happens."

But something did happen.

At eight o'clock Bennett sat at his typewriter in the local room of the St. Louis *Telegram* with a sheaf of useless notes scattered in front of him, writing steadily.

At six o'clock Doldge had been murdered—Stephen Doldge!

The police were holding a woman at headquarters, questioning her. But that was only a formality. She had confessed readily enough on the scene to detectives.

Bennett had studied her carefully when he rushed from headquarters with the police in answer to the call from her apartment. A calm unemotional woman, with no hint of a furious passion such as would have interested Doldge. She wasn't even pretty. But then, he was no longer young.

She received them with apathetic hospitality, as if they were tiresome guests and she was weary of the necessity of entertainment, and she showed them the body with a casualness which drained the blood from their faces.

She had found the poisoning simple, she said. A tablet in his cocktail, and at the first gulp, his heart fluttered and he toppled forward as dead as a dead fish. They asked her what she did then, and she said she laughed a little.

Bennett regarded the man's wide fearful stare as he lay there on the rug, and it seemed to him rather silly that this should be Doldge. Doldge couldn't die like that. He was the city's richest man; he was the boss of St. Louis politics. He ruled. He was King Canute commanding the waves, and the waves he commanded respected his orders. Doldge couldn't die like that.

But he had died like that. His evil had caught up with him. He and the story the white-faced woman made of him was the best news-copy that could be written in St. Louis.

Jordan, the city editor, glowed as Bennett turned over his yarn. He pawed through the pages, passing them over to Burrowes, who sat at the head of the copy-desk.

"Just wait till the city claps eyes on this one. The world would have to come to an end to take the headlines away from this story in this town."

Bennett nodded.

"It's worth an extra."

"The nine-o'clock edition will catch it quick enough. You better grab yourself a bite to eat and hurry back. We might have something for a new lead."

Bennett telephoned Anne. He told her something of the story. But that wasn't the purpose of his call.

"If we clean up on this early, Jordan may let me get away," he said. "Maybe by midnight."

"Oh, I hope so."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing much. Just waiting for you." A pause from her, somewhat embarrassed. Then, quickly, irrelevantly, to cover that embarrassment: "The radio won't work."

He laughed. "Oh, my dear, you're so apparent."

"Don't you dare laugh at me. I say the radio won't work."

"Good. The better opportunity to think more about me."

"Oh, I couldn't do that." Her voice trembled. "Please hurry home. I have such a strange feeling."

"It'll be all right. It's rather how you must expect to feel at a time like this."

"It isn't that. It's—oh, I don't know—but do come quickly when you can. I'm missing you so."

"I'll do my best," he said, and told her good-by, and put down the telephone. As he passed Jordan's desk on his way to supper, he heard the radio editor saying:

"Funny, the radio isn't working. Stations all seem dead. The best I can get is a blur."

Jordan glanced up, interested.

"Some atmospheric disturbance."

"Yes."

"Call up somebody and find out. It's worth a story."

BENNETT had supper. When he got back, he heard Burrowes complaining to Jordan that he was in a hell of a fix. Cable communication with Europe had been cut off. The Associated Press carried a story that the interruption of service probably was due to disturbance at the bottom of the sea, although seismographs had not recorded any earth-tremors.

"That's strange," said Jordan. "Radio reception's shot, too."

"Oh, well, that gives us more room for your Doldge story. Whoop it up!"

"You'll get plenty."

Jordan called to Bennett. He wanted a completely new story on Doldge for the second edition, based on developments brought in by reporters detailed at headquarters to catch any late angles: The woman's history—twenty years with Doldge; her discovery of a casual infidelity which prompted the act.

Bennett did a careful, workmanlike job. It was around eleven-thirty when

he turned in his copy. Jordan glanced at it and nodded.

"Good work. You might as well pull out," he said. "This will hold them. Good night."

"Good night," said Bennett.

His way led past Holland and Meisenberg, night rewrite men. Meisenberg spat into a wastebasket.

"Lucky stiff, to be going home at a white man's hour!"

IN the corridor, just outside the editorial room, Bennett waited for the elevator. It did not come. He was eight floors up, too far to walk. Impatiently he pressed the button again.

The door to the Associated Press wire room, across the corridor from the elevator-shaft, opened, and a man hurried out, followed by the clatter of half a dozen telegraph keys. It was Foster, the Associated Press correspondent. Bennett turned to look at him.

Foster was lank and indolent. He did not usually hurry. He was hurrying now. He carried in his hand a sheet of yellow flimsy.

"What's up, Foster?"

The man did not answer. Bennett sensed he couldn't answer. He waved the yellow sheet at Bennett, and was gone into the editorial room.

The elevator finally was coming. Bennett heard the click of the clutch and saw the cables start to move. He hesitated, considering. There was news in Foster's flimsy—important news. He wanted to know what it was, but if he went back into the editorial room, he might be pressed into work again. There might be a local angle to the story.

His mind picked up a picture of Anne as she would be waiting for him. She would be a little drowsy, her hair would be tousled from weary fingers holding up her head as she nodded, but she would smile her funny crooked smile as she looked at him adoringly. . . . The elevator door swung open. "Going down?"

"No," said Bennett.

"Then what's the idea of disturbing a man at his supper?"

Bennett did not hear. He opened the door and stepped into the editorial room.

He faced a tableau: Foster, Jordan, Burrowes, Holland, Meisenberg, the copy-readers grouped at the city desk, staring, unseeing, at the piece of yellow flimsy that fluttered in Foster's fingers. Bennett moved to the desk.

"What is it, Harry?"

Jordan looked at him vacantly, then by a physical effort jerked himself to consciousness. He took the paper from Foster's rigid hand and handed it to Bennett.

The others mechanically shifted their gaze to the reporter as he read the Associated Press bulletin:

> New York, N. Y., Sept. 27 (AP)—An unbroken wall of fire, fully a mile high, rose out of the sea tonight and is sweeping toward the city at great speed.

Bennett looked up. All their eyes met his. They hadn't been able to say anything, but somehow they expected words from him.

"Hell," he said. "There goes the play on the Doldge murder."

Foster's copy-boy came running through the door, another sheet of flimsy in his hand.

"Chicago bulletins all wires are down in the East!" he cried. "This came through a few seconds before."

Foster took the flimsy. His face became gray as fog as he read swiftly:

> Newark, N. J., Sept. 27 (AP)—The entire city of New York has been engulfed by the wall of fire which appeared on the horizon of the sea at twelve-thirty o'clock this morning.
>
> All lives are believed lost and the city is demolished.
>
> The line of fire apparently is unbroken from north to south and is proceeding westward at the speed of about two hundred miles an hour.
>
> Because of the magnitude and the unaccountable cause of the blaze, it is believed that it signals the end of the world.
>
> This city is in turmoil. In an instant more it will be destroyed.
>
> This is the final thirty, boys.

As Foster finished reading, Burrowes took the sheet, glanced through it and automatically his pencil crossed out the last sentence as an editorial comment.

Burrowes not only was head of the copy-desk. He was night editor. In an emergency, with the managing editor away, he was boss. Jordan looked at him.

"Well, Lon?"

Burrowes dropped the flimsy on his own desk.

"We get out a paper."

"Extra?"

"Sure. Somebody try to locate the Old Man on the telephone and tell him." He turned to Foster. "Do you think the wire will carry anything more from the East?"

"Hard to say. Chicago probably will have a general lead in a minute or two."

"All right." He spoke to the others. "Well, let's get going. There's plenty for local angles, Jordan; better hop to it."

He sat down at his desk, began pasting the flimsy on pulp copy-paper. The copy-readers moved slowly to their chairs. The reporters stood looking at Jordan. The gray had gone from their faces. It was unlikely that one of them believed the doom applied to himself, and if it did, habit was strong. They were to get out a paper. That was the order. Death was a vague thing. This was an immediate job. It was, moreover, a duty.

They didn't think out these things. They acted instinctively. They were neither brave nor cowardly. News was an impersonal thing. They never, or seldom, made it. They only retailed it. Here was the biggest news of all. This was no time to discard procedure. They were prepared to go on with the task until a usual "Good night!" released them from their duties. Then they might think about it; then they might become sick with fear, or dulled with dread; they might take this complete destruction to include themselves and each in his own way face oblivion. But now—

JORDAN'S voice cracked an order. "Holland, get in touch with Higgs at headquarters; tell him to call the mayor, and the police and fire commissioners. I want to know if there's anything they think they can do to fight the fire. When you get Higgs started, phone Archbishop Dunne, Reverend Waters of the First Baptist Church and Rabbi Weinstock, and find out what they have to say.

"Meisenberg, go back in the morgue and dig up a copy of the Bible. You'll find something in the last part of it—Revelations, I believe—on the end of the world. Get what you need out of there, then copy off a few paragraphs about Noah's Ark and the end of the world the first time by water. Combine what you find, and if it's any good, we'll put it on Page One and give you a by-line.

"Bennett, I want you to write a story saying that the only hope that anyone has been saved in the places the fire has reached, is that some may have been in airplanes and flown eastward over the blaze. Wait a minute. Before you do that, knock out a box saying this newspaper advises those who can get into airplanes to do so and fly east over the fire and trust to finding a landing-place in the burned-over area. Say it's their only hope, for the fire seems to burn on water as well as land, and that even if they make the Pacific, it won't do them any good."

Burrowes turned to Jordan.

"We can't wait for all that. I'm going to shoot with what I've got now."

"Sure," said Jordan, "but you'll want to replate if you get a Chicago lead, and we'll be ready then."

Foster still stood at the city desk. It wasn't his business to interfere with the *Telegram's* staff, but he had a suggestion.

"If I were you, Lon," he said to Burrowes, "I'd wait for Chicago. Something may have happened to check the fire, and there's no use driving people crazy until you have to."

Burrowes considered. "All right." Then to Jordan: "Step on your stuff, Harry, and maybe we can make it all."

Meisenberg returned on the run from the morgue.

"Can you beat it, Jordan!" he cried. "There isn't a copy of the Bible back there."

"The Old Man's got one in his office downstairs. Get the night watchman to give you a key and go get it."

Meisenberg ran for the elevator.

Holland came out of a telephone booth, dripping perspiration.

"I got your preachers, Harry," he said.

"Anything worth while?"

"They all said the same thing: 'It's the will of God.'"

"That helps. What else?"

"A little from each. None of them had any tip-off on it."

"All right. Write what you've got."

Foster's boy came in with several more sheets of flimsy. The Associated Press man glanced at them.

"Here's your Chicago lead, Lon," he said.

Burrowes took the copy and read:

> Chicago, Sept. 27 (AP)—The end of the world is here. A wall of fire, extending from the farthest points north and south, is sweeping west at the rate of two hundred miles an hour, demolishing everything in its path.
>
> First seen when it appeared on the Atlantic ocean horizon, the blaze soon reached the coast-line. New York City, its millions of inhabitants and billions of dollars in property, is wiped from the face of the earth. Philadelphia, Boston, Portland, Baltimore, all the coast cities, are no more; and within an hour of sending this dispatch Pittsburgh, Cleveland and other East Central cities apparently will be destroyed.
>
> Meager dispatches reached the Chicago office of the Associated Press from several of the doomed cities before the fire destroyed all communication.
>
> Portland, Maine, was first to report the approaching destruction. The fragmentary sentence, "A mountain of fire rose out of the Atlantic Ocean this morning and is—" came over the wire from there at a little after eleven P. M. central standard time. Because of its incompleteness this dispatch was not relayed immediately, but was held up in the hope further information would clarify the mystifying phrase.
>
> However, nothing more was heard until the direct wire from New York carried a complete paragraph, revealing the approach of the fire there. A few seconds later another paragraph came through from Newark, N. J., telling of the destruction of New York and definitely determining that the phenomena signaled the end of the world.
>
> Newspapers here are getting out extra editions telling of the approaching cataclysm, and grave fear is felt that riots will follow.

The dispatch concluded with the word "More," indicating additional news would follow as it reached Chicago headquarters of the Associated Press for relaying to other cities on the circuit.

Burrowes tossed the story across the desk to one of his copy-readers.

"Send that along in short takes, Jim," he said. "Slug it 'World.' Send up a kill on the 'Doldge' eight-column banner, and write one for this story. Same size—ninety-six point Gothic bold." He turned to another copy-reader. "Farnham, you knock 'Doldge' down to a regular number twenty-four. Put a fourteen on 'Farmer' and hold 'Justice' to the same."

Farnham was white about the lips. He stood up.

"I don't like doing this, Lon," he said. "But I've got a couple of kids at home. You don't get much chance to see them when you work nights. I'd like to have a couple of hours."

Burrowes looked up, nodded his head.

"Yeh, I know. That's all right. Good night."

"Good night," said Farnham and went away. There were three copy-readers left.

"Anybody else?" asked Burrowes.

HIS eyes went from one to the other of them. Here a drawn, haunted face met his glance; there an ironically smiling one; the other dulled and vacant, each after the heart of him.

Before Farnham spoke, Burrowes had taken his men's restraint, their sticking to the job, as something to be expected. In fact, it is doubtful if it ever came into his mind that they were doing the unusual. Certainly it had not entered into their consciousnesses. They themselves had not considered their places as human beings in this debacle; mechanically they had prepared to follow routine without thought of courage or heroism.

But Farnham's action served to strip the impersonal from the scene. This thing was going to include them too. Fate was not going to set up a press-box on the outer edges of cataclysm and issue passes. They were to be players in this cosmic game, marchers in this last parade. They realized this now.

That was why this face suddenly showed drawn and haunted, and this one ironically smiling and the other dulled and vacant, each after the heart of him. It took courage now to sit there at the half-moon copy-desk and wait and work.

Burrowes saw the change and understood. He waited.

"Anybody else?" he repeated.

None moved. A flash of admiration for them swept through Burrowes. Without further word he gave them more work. Their heads bent over paper, and their pencils raced.

Burrowes looked at their lowered heads and thought:

"If they had gone, they would have been like everyone else will be when the end comes—dying like rats in a flaming barn, twisting themselves with remorse for tiny sins, or cursing the destiny that condemns them to this kind of death. But here's opportunity for gesture—magnificent gesture. There's a laugh in this—a splendid, ironic laugh.

"Tell the world that it is dying, and keep telling the world that it is dying, until you too are dead. Edition after edition as the end comes closer. The world always has demanded news; you've given your lives to assembling it. All right, then, let them have their news; let them have it until it chokes them with its ghastliness and conclusion."

Jordan was interrupted in his thoughts at this point.

"I got the Old Man on the phone. He says hold the paper until he gets down here. He's on his way."

Burrowes sat back stunned.

"Is he crazy? Did you tell him what it was?"

"Sure. He said he'd hurry. He wants to be in on this, I guess, and there's no other morning paper to beat us to the street."

Burrowes shrugged. "All right. He's the boss."

"That gives me more time for my stuff," Jordan said.

"Yes, but you'll have to hurry."

Jordan turned away and crossed over to Bennett.

"How you coming, Bennett?"

Bennett jerked the copy-paper from his typewriter.

"Just finished," he said. "Here you are."

Jordan took the copy, then spoke to Holland, whose desk was next to Bennett's.

"How about you, Holland?"

The man was writing hard. Without looking up he said: "In a minute."

"Hear from Higgs at headquarters?"

"Sure. The mayor says everything will be done to fight the fire. All equipment's been ordered to the river front. The police have been detailed to check rioting."

"All right. Hurry up."

Meisenberg popped through the hall door.

"I searched the Old Man's office, Harry, but there's no Bible there."

"Too bad. I wanted that."

"I know where there's one up the street—at Jennie's place."

"You'll be too late. Let me go."

Jordan went back to Burrowes with Bennett's copy.

"We're about cleaned up on local angles unless there's something else you think ought to go."

"No. With Holland's stories we'll have all we can set. We'll have the paper ready to shoot when the Old Man comes. The wire will be carrying plenty more."

The wire carried much more. Fifteen minutes passed—twenty. Then the flood. Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Erie, Chicago, from all sources, the news flowed in. Burrowes fumed as he sent dispatch after dispatch to the composing-room.

"We ought to have been on the street a half-hour ago!" he cried. "Where's the Old Man?"

Bennett, finished his tasks, found a place at Burrowes' shoulder and read the dispatches as they came to the copy desk. They all told the same story: Newspapers had put out extra editions. Cities had been awakened from their slumber. Terror ruled.

Cincinnati was at the mercy of pillagers; the streets were actually littered with bodies of persons who could not face the end and had committed suicide. In another hour it would be all over there. In Indianapolis, persons driven insane by the impending cataclysm had set fire to the city and were hurling themselves by the hundreds into pyres of their own making. Churches were crowded by those who had the strength of faith to make their peace, but madness possessed many. Louisville was filled with surging mobs bent on a last-minute realization of desires.

One by one the cities reported. From no source was there hope. Astronomical observatories said their instruments and observations had given them no warning of the catastrophe, and declined to advance an explanation until receiving further information. There was precious little expectation that such would be forthcoming. This thing had not happened according to the rules of science. It appeared that the earth suddenly had opened up some place in mid-Atlantic from the force of a terrific explosion within itself, and sent this mile-high blaze of fire eating its way through the crust of the world.

Apparently, too, the earth was falling out of its orbit, rushing frantically through space, destroying the ether balance and accounting for muted radios and silenced wireless.

Direct communication between the United States and Europe had been cut off for hours, and now came mystified word from the Far East that that quarter of the globe had lost telegraph and cable contact with England and the continent. London too, then, and Paris and other cities of the eastern edges of the Atlantic, had met their doom. It meant that the fire was spreading east and west from that belching seam down the middle of the earth, and that it would converge somewhere in the Pacific, its circle of destruction completed, its end accomplished.

Bennett moved away from Burrowes' shoulder and crossed to the window. "This, then," he thought, "is the finish!" He looked at the sky, and it twinkled with stars; he looked at the city below, and it rested in sleep, refreshing itself for the tomorrow which would never come. It seemed funny; it was unbelievable. "This is idiocy," he thought; "this is nightmare." He shook his head to awaken himself, and glanced back inside the room.

He was awake enough. The tense concentration of the men hunched over the half-moon copy-desk; Holland's flying fingers at a typewriter; the slap of the pneumatic tube as copy was sent hurtling to the composing-room on the floor above, proved that. He was awake and he must die, he and —and Anne.

Anne. Surely, God, not Anne!

Something went clear out of him. His head whirled. His eyes closed, and he steadied himself against the window-ledge to keep from falling. Then, as his faintness vanished, he continued to hold tight to keep from madness. He suddenly wanted to scream and shout; he wanted to laugh and sing and bellow. He wanted everything and all things and nothing. He wanted to curl on the floor in a corner and cry like a baby. And he wanted terribly, terribly to sleep.

A TELEPHONE ringing in a nearby booth cut through the mists that clouded over his will. Slowly he saw clear again. He heard Jordan bark at him:

"Answer that, Bennett, will you?"

He moved to the booth, took down the receiver.

It was Higgs at police headquarters. Bennett listened, then leaned out of the booth and called Jordan.

"It's Higgs," he said. "Wants to know if there's anything more for him."

"Tell him to stick there until he gets a good-night. There'll be plenty to do."

Bennett relayed the message. He heard a curse at the other end of the wire, and then the connection cut off. He hung up the receiver, sat there without moving.

He must call Anne. He must call Anne and tell her this thing was going to happen. She must be prepared. He thought of her getting up from where she would be sitting, reading; he saw her cross to the telephone and pick up the receiver and sweep the hair back from her forehead and then say, "hello." He saw her eyes as they would change from the gladness of greeting him to horror at what he said. They would not change at once.

She would say, "What?" in an easy, laughing voice; and then she would say, "What?" in a voice in which the laugh was dying, and then she would say, *"Paul, come to me—come to me!"* so that he would cry out and become mad again. He would go to her, and they would cling together, waiting for the end. There would be four hours —no, less than four now—iin which to grovel and lose grace and love in terror and blind fear. Or, even worse, there would be nothing. They would be only dull, leaden things, and her graciousness would die and she would suffer, and there would be no crooked little smile on her lips, nor phrases from which the Irish would not leave.

He had picked up the telephone. Now he put it down.

Anne must not know. Somehow, some way, she must not know. She must be asleep; she must be unconscious of it; she must be at peace in her heart when the end came upon them.

He stood up and left the booth, and crossed to the copy-desk where he again stood at Burrowes' shoulder. But this time he did not read the dispatches as they came to the desk. He only stood there, and that's where he was standing when the Old Man came in.

The Old Man was not an old man. He was only called that because it was easy to say and easy to think, and there was a certain amount of affection held for him. He was Joe McAuliffe, and a very loud silk shirt clung moistly to his body, and a cigar showed ragged between his teeth. He reminded you of a bulldog, and give him a piece of news to bite on and choke and shake, and he was very like a bulldog. Here was news to suit him, and you could see him set himself for the charge.

"All right," he said. "What's all this?"

Burrowes told him. He told him of the New York bulletin, the Chicago general lead, the stories from Cleveland and Cincinnati and the other lost cities.

"What have you done?"

"Everything's in type. We're giving it all we've got. The front page will look like this." Burrowes

sketched a lay-out of the front page make-up as he had planned it. McAuliffe nodded.

"Good. Any proofs?"

BURROWES showed him the proofs that had come down from the composing-room. McAuliffe glanced through them, whistled.

"This is something, isn't it?"

"We're ready to go when you say the word."

"What about you, Jordan? Local angles?"

Jordan told him about the statements of the minister, the rabbi and the priests; he told him about the official orders of the mayor to assemble all fire-fighting apparatus at the river. McAuliffe threw away his cigar in disgust.

"The fool!" he said. "What does he think this is, something like the stockyards burning?"

"He probably doesn't understand," Jordan answered. "He probably can't understand. It's difficult enough, even reading these." He indicated the proofs of the stories that lay on the desk in front of McAuliffe, and McAuliffe nodded slowly.

"What about the police?"

"They've called out the reserves and stationed them in congested sections to check rioting."

"That makes some sense. There'll be the devil to pay when the boys start yelling this extra on the streets." McAuliffe stood up, pulled his wet shirt free, where it stuck to his sides. "Well, might as well let her go."

Bennett stepped forward. He was deathly pale now.

"Just a minute Chief. Are you sure you're right about this?"

McAuliffe looked at him. They all looked at him. The big man frowned.

"What are you talking about?"

Bennett hesitated. He wanted to be clear now. It was so important that he be clear. He was talking for Anne—he suddenly realized he was talking for many other Annes, although the others really didn't matter very much to him.

"Well," said Joe McAuliffe, "what are you talking about?"

"This—this extra," Bennett said, "this letting people know."

"What the hell! Why shouldn't they know?"

"It'll be awful. Everyone will go crazy, just the way they have every place else they've found out. They'll have hours before them to face it. God knows what will happen!" Bennett was stumbling incoherently for words.

McAuliffe was impatient.

"What could happen worse than what *will* happen?"

"Everything. Dying in fear. Knowing you're going to die. Trapped. That's not how I'd like to die."

McAuliffe said nothing. For almost the first time, the human in the man and the editor in him met in conflict. It gave Bennett a moment to go on.

"We're the only morning paper here, and only a few will know if we keep quiet," he urged. But McAuliffe shook himself and spoke gruffly.

"It's our job to give 'em the news. What happens afterward isn't our business."

"But it *is* our business. Look here. Read that." He handed McAuliffe a proof of the story from Indianapolis.

"I've read it."

"Why should that happen here? What possible end will it serve to have people killing themselves, committing every crime, dying like animals in a trap?"

"They'll know it anyway before the end."

"No—not all of them. And if they do, it'll be for a shorter time. They'll not have so long to lose themselves."

"This is a newspaper."

Burrowes leaned toward them. His eyes were bright.

"That's what I say, Chief," he said. "Give it to 'em!"

Bennett turned. "You're wrong, Lon. God, don't you see how wrong?"

"You haven't been in this business very long, have you?"

"Long enough. That's got nothing to do with it."

"I've sat at desks like this for twenty years. I'm not giving up this story."

Bennett turned back to McAuliffe.

"You can see it, can't you, Chief? Look! Those streets out there are quiet. There are a million people asleep. Why do we have to wake them up for news like this—why do we have to send them in to a hell—crazy."

"We know it. We're not crazy."

"That isn't the same. We're detached. We never think of ourselves as part of anything. We're not even conscious this thing is going to hit us. We can't be. Our minds won't entertain it. It's news that comes from New York—from other places. It's got a local angle, that's all. Well, I'm thinking of it now. I'm thinking of it not for myself, but for some one I love. I don't want her to be told she's going to die. I don't want to see her terror and her fear and her madness. I want her to go easily and sweetly, just as she's lived. Can't you understand?"

Burrowes' eyes burned.

"How about us—these men here?" His arm waved to include the group at the copy-desk. "One of them walked out. That made us think. But we stuck because we had a job to do. Maybe they knew that our only salvation was holding on here. Where do we fit into this?"

"We're only a few. We're better equipped."

"Equipped better for what—to die? What kind of a life have you led?"

"Not very good. But here's our chance to wipe out a lot. Have you thought of that?"

Burrowes looked toward McAuliffe.

"It's up to you, Chief."

McAuliffe slowly shook his head. "I know what you mean, Bennett," he said. "I know how you feel. But we can't do much. The radio—"

"The radio's been dead for hours."

"All right. But telephone and telegraph-wires are still working where the fire hasn't reached, and news like this has its own magic way of spreading. Half an hour from now, they'll all know." His hand swept to include the sleeping city. "They'll know, whether we print a paper or not and that's our job. See?"

Bennett nodded. "It's your paper."

"It's a newspaper." And McAuliffe turned to Burrowes. "Let her go, Lon."

Burrowes spoke to the composing-room through the direct telephone. "All right. Let her go, Abby."

FOR an instant there was dead silence as each man sank into his own thoughts. Burrowes shook himself. He spoke to McAuliffe.

"All right to give a good-night, boss?"

"Why not? We're all washed up."

Burrowes grinned. "You said it." He faced his men. "All right, you fellows. Good night."

The three copy-readers stood up, started to file out, a little lost. It was rather more as if they were losing their jobs than anything else.

"And so long!" Burrowes added.

"So long, Lon!" they said.

Bennett, Holland and Meisenberg looked at Jordan, who nodded. "I guess that goes for you guys too," he said. "Good night."

"Good night, Harry."

"Oh, Holland, you might telephone Higgs his good-night at headquarters."

Holland went to the telephone. Bennett and Meisenberg said good night to Burrowes and McAuliffe and went out. There could be no leave-taking, such as there would have been if one had been quitting the paper, or going on vacation. They were dulled, somehow. There was no feeling, no imminence of separation, only a strange emptiness. McAuliffe and Burrowes and Jordan were left.

"Well," Burrowes said, "I'm thirsty. How about a drink?"

"Suits me," said McAuliffe. "Joe's still open. Coming, Jordan?"

"Sure—why not?"

They slipped into their coats.

Burrowes let his hand trail along the top of the copy-desk as he went out.

"So long," he said softly, under his breath.

Bennett took a taxicab home. He sat within himself as the car sped along. The streets, he thought, were strangely quiet. They weren't really. It was just the way he thought.

THE driver pulled up at a crossing to allow a roaring group of fire-wagons to thunder past.

"That's about the tenth company I've come across tonight," he said. "You're from the *Telegram*. What's up?"

"Nothing," said Bennett. "Only a fire on the levee."

"Must be a big one to pull all these uptown babies down here."

"Yes, it is."

At his door Bennett handed the man a ten-dollar bill, all he had with him.

"You're out all night, aren't you?"

The man nodded. "Until six in the morning."

"You can keep the change from that if you'll go out and get blind drunk."

"Well, that's not hard to take."

"Make it a promise?"

"It's made."

"Okay. Good night."

The man saluted. Bennett went inside, walked up the two flights to his apartment. He noticed that the hand holding the key to the door shook as he took it from his pocket and he paused a moment to collect himself. He thought his face must be very white and he bent over, holding his breath, until he felt the blood flushing his cheeks. Then he fitted the key into the lock and opened the door.

Anne was not in the living-room. He found her in the kitchen where he had thought she'd be, and she was reading a book at the table with her head propped up by her hands. Her hair was a little tousled, her eyelids drooped with sleepiness. She looked up, saw him in the doorway, and was in his arms before he could speak.

"Oh, I thought you'd never come!"

He held her very close.

"You shouldn't have waited up."

"I couldn't go to bed tonight without you here." She started helping him off with his coat. "You'll be tired. Should I make tea?"

"No. Some beer will be just right."

"It's fine." She smiled her crooked, shy smile. "I cheated. I had a bottle."

He laughed, crossed to the table, and sat down. His legs were strangely weak. He looked at the book she had been reading. It was Hudson's "Green Mansions."

"Like this?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Think to be wearing dresses made of spiders' webs."

"Did somebody do that?"

"Yes, *Rima*, the girl. She lived alone in the green forest. She was afraid of all men. It was very beautiful."

She put the chicken sandwiches and beer in front of him and sat down opposite. He watched her.

"You're a lovely, lonely spirit," he said. "You should live alone in a forest and wear dresses of spiders' webs and be queen of all things beautiful and sweet."

"Oh, yes. But not alone. Not without you. What would I be doing without you?"

He looked over the edge of a sandwich, smiled at her.

"Then what happened to *Rima*?"

She half filled a glass and watched it foam to the top before she said, slowly and softly as if she were a long way off: "*Rima* died."

"Oh." His voice was an echo of hers, and their eyes suddenly raised and met. He had to hold fiercely to himself, for there was a depth of fear in her glance which caused him to shrink back. She leaned across the table. "Oh, Paul, I'm afraid tonight. Terribly afraid."

He stood up quickly and came around the table to her.

"There now," he said. "Don't tremble so. Nothing's going to happen."

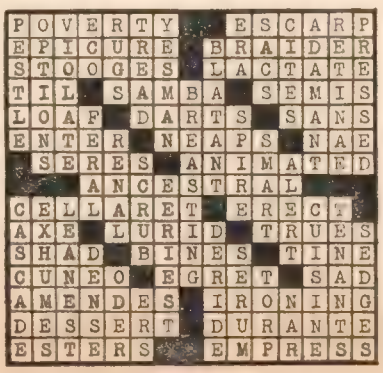
"I know. But all day it's been like that, as if— Paul, you and I aren't ever going to die, are we?"

She spoke desperately, her words a challenge to the intuitive sense of doom which seized her. His hand smoothed the hair back from her forehead.

"No, dear. We aren't going to die. Some day we'll have to move on some place, but that's all."

"I couldn't die now. It wouldn't be fair—now that we have so much to live for." She put his hand against her body. "It's our baby, Paul."

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 57



He thought: "This, too, will never come to pass." But he said: "Cutting up an awful fuss for such a little thing, isn't it?"

"We'll be proud of him. He's a strong one."

He laughed. "Why is it Irish girls always want their babies to be boys?"

"Never you mind now. This is a boy, I'm telling you."

As suddenly as her fear had descended upon her, it left her, and he talked on swiftly so that she would not revert to it. "Did you see the doctor today?"

She smiled.

"I'm fine. I guess I'm the kind that thrives on it."

"Did he say how long?"

"About six weeks."

"That would be—"

"July eighteenth."

"Well! Almost my birthday."

"I told the doctor I'd like it put off a week on account of that, but he only laughed. I don't think it was much to ask."

He smiled and kissed her and turned away. . . . The minutes were speeding. In an hour, in less than that, word of earth's end would come to all. The quiet of their neighboring streets would be shattered with awful sounds as each tortured mind met death in its own way. Then Anne would know. There could be no stopping her knowing. Even in sleep she would be awakened, and awake she would catch the first faint despairing cry.

Should he, then, tell her now and try to comfort her, pretending death was easy if it came to them together? Would she be strong enough for that? Would she forgive him his silence if he didn't? Or would it, as his first impulse had prompted him, still be better to hide it from her to the last, stealing from the vanishing moments a precious few for love, holding the laugh in her eyes until it no longer could be held and the smile on her lips until terror drove it forth?

Her eyes noticed his paleness.

"Are you all right, dear?" she asked anxiously.

He avoided her glance.

"Fine. My eyes are a little tired, that's all."

"You work too hard." She paused as he drained his glass, then went on: "You were so late coming home after you telephoned. Was there some late news held you up?"

He wet his dry lips with his tongue. "No—no. Only Doldge. They wanted to be sure everything was covered."

"That was terrible about Doldge, wasn't it?"

"I guess he had it coming to him."

"But what a horrible way to die."

"It didn't have to be. She hated him. The poison she used was like fire. She could have used morphine if

she wanted to. There was enough in the house—"

He paused, and his face suddenly went white. He stared at her, and held hard to the table with hands that did not seem to belong to him. She rose swiftly.

"Paul, you're sick!"

He stood up, turned his back to her and walked across the room to the enameled sink. He twisted the faucet and spoke impatiently, so she would not question him further.

"It's my eyes, I tell you."

"Let me do something. There's boracic acid."

"Cold water will do just as well. I'll have them looked at tomorrow. Now suppose you get to bed. It's long past your hour."

"Oh, I couldn't sleep now."

"Nevertheless, get to bed. You're under doctor's orders."

"Won't you come now?"

"I want to finish my sandwich first."

She left the room, and he went back to the table and sat down.

WAS this, then, the answer? His eyes stared into space, his brain revolved in torment. Death already was a phantom shadow hovering outside the door, but could he take it by the hand and lead it inside? That woman had killed Doidge in hate. Could he kill in love? At no matter what gracious gain, did he have the right to do that?

He got up and went to the back door which opened off the kitchen onto a small porch forming part of the fire-escape. Across the alley loomed the back of other apartment-houses, striped gray in a strangely orange moonlight. It was deathly quiet, the only movement the slow swing of a piece of tattered awning which moved from the force of a dry, lifeless breeze that to Bennett's mind seemed to carry the smell of things dead and dying. It was as if he were being breathed upon from the lungs of a decaying corpse.

Suddenly, from one of the apartments across the way, the stillness was cut by the subdued ring of a telephone. In one room lights were turned on. A second passed, then more lights, until the whole apartment was ablaze. The telephone, Bennett realized, must have carried warning. He knew then McAuliffe had been right. News like this spread regardless of means to suppress it. Cries of newsboys shouting their extras would only serve to complete knowledge of the impending doom. He watched, and in a moment the apartment on the same floor, opposite the first, lighted up. Word was spreading.

He heard a woman's smothered scream and saw a rear window jerked frantically shut by a man whose face he could not see, but whose body was outlined against the light behind him. For a moment more he stood watching and listening, and then, as from a distance, he heard another cry, a thin, despairing, awful cry, which choked off suddenly in the throat—and left him trembling.

That cry resolved him.

He straightened up, looked for a moment into the face of the strangely orange moon and went inside. Passing through the kitchen he turned off the lights. In the hallway he took the telephone-receiver from the hook. Anne heard him from the bedroom and called:

"What was that cry I heard?"

"Why—nothing. I didn't hear anything."

"Oh! Are you coming to bed?"

"In a moment, dear."

She was awake. That meant he would have to work swiftly.

On a shelf of the medicine cabinet, in a small bottle, he found half of what he wanted. On another shelf, in a square pasteboard box, he found the other half.

The bottle held half-grain tablets of morphine; the box held capsules of a harmless sleeping-powder.

He emptied two of the capsules of the powder and filled each of them with four of the small tablets. Four grains in all, a lethal dose.

He allowed himself no introspection, no thought. He steeled himself to move swiftly and surely. He knew he would not be able to go through with it if he stopped to consider. Anne—her love, her trust—the child that was to have come—these things would stay his hand if he listened to the still small voice of hope that would not die in his heart.

ONLY once did he hesitate. That was to ask himself whether he should take four grains of the drug and join Anne in the slumber from which there would be no awakening. Side by side he could lie with her, and then, when the end came—an end of fire and burning and horror and suffering—he would be at peace, too, in a death-sleep, easy and gracious and without pain.

But this temptation he put away. He would wait, holding her, loving her, conscious to the end, reaping from death the last second of that which had been the most beautiful in life.

He filled a glass with water, took the two capsules, turned out the light and went into the bedroom. The lamp on the table beside the bed threw a soft, dull light over her face. She smiled up at him.

"You were so long. What were you doing?"

"Nothing much. Getting your sleeping-powders."

"Oh, I don't want them tonight. I want to lie awake and talk to you."

"None of that, now. You've got to sleep."

He came slowly around the bed with the capsules and the water. In the rosy light from the lamp his gray face showed flushed and clear. He held one hand against the other to steady it, but the glass shook and water spilled on the coverlet.

"Clumsy!" she laughed. "Give me that."

Suddenly he lost all courage. He wanted to take back the glass, but his nerveless hands would not move. She reached up and took it from him.

"Now the powders," she said.

He could only look at her. He no longer had strength to act. His eyes were coals of fire burning into his head. With all his strength he wanted to cry out. But he could do nothing except watch with mad fascination as she took the capsules from his opened palm. His tongue held to the back of his teeth. She looked up at him amusedly.

"You needn't be so grim about it," she said. "I'll take them."

She reached up and took the capsules from his opened palm. With a grimace of distaste she put the capsules into her mouth and washed them down with the water.

"There. Satisfied?"

He nodded, found strength somehow to take the glass from her and put it down on the lamp table. He looked at her. For a moment he had the feeling he was looking at some one he had never before seen. He was curiously dispassionate. Then, suddenly, the fullness of it all burst upon him. He fell to his knees beside her.

"Oh, my dear!" he cried.

"Paul, Paul! I love you so."

He held her, then, and talked to her, until finally she was still in his arms. And when at last the streets outside filled with a milling, maddened, doomed multitude he still held her, while she slept her lasting sleep, unafraid, unknowing, a smile on her lips.

The end found him that way, his arms around her, his body close to hers. The fire that consumed him in its swift embrace took its toll of awful terror from his soul. But she never knew. . . .

(You of the spirit world who read this each has your own story of that last day of Earth. Some of you may have a memory of something bravely done, of some suffering shared. Let this story of two people who loved each other be part of that legend.)

A counterclockwise story of the Italian campaign

OLD MAN *with*

THE group of soldiers, Canadians and New Zealanders, were grouped about a huge stone that had been upturned by shellfire on the Italian hillside. They were all of the Eighth Army. Rain and mud dimmed the day, and German shells blocked the pass ahead with roaring frequency. The advance was halted.

The stone, which bore an inscription, was thus an object of eager curiosity to those of the men not digging into their rations or hugging themselves in wet misery. One Canadian was writing with a bullet on a ration-box, translating the inscription; when Cosgrave came up to the group the Canuck was just announcing his findings.

"It's a Roman milestone, lads. It says that the Emperor Claudius made this road from Cerfennia to the mouth of the Aeternus—that's Pescara, on the coast—in what would be the year 48 A.D."

"But where's Cerfennia?" demanded someone.

A burly Anzac shoved up. "That's about where the town of Pescina shows on the maps of the district ahead," he declared. "The old Roman road called Via Valeria, after the guy who built it, went that far. Claudius extended it to the sea, and it was called Via Claudia Valeria. But you're wrong about that date, chum. It would be the year 49—"

They were off on a hot argument, both the Canuck and the Anzac being Latin scholars.

Evening was approaching now, and orders came to billet for the night, until tanks could be brought up through the sea of mud that filled the valleys and roads, to attack the pass ahead.

Cosgrave went back to advanced Headquarters, his thin, nervous features twitching, his eyes gloomy and oppressed. He found Lundgren near the parked truck that carried their traveling laboratory and equipment.

"Stalled again," he said irritably. "Good God! It's past bearing! Here we got pitched in with this British outfit on the promise that we'd join Mark Clark's Army in a few days and be with our own men. And never a chance! Getting ahead three or four miles a day. No nearer Rome; no nearer anywhere! All our work stopped—"

"The whole Army's in the same fix, John," Lundgren said quietly. His broad, compact features were untroubled, but worry was in his eyes.

"Be damned to it! The Army's job is fighting. Ours isn't. We're supposed to be scientists of a sort. And what are we now? Bloody damned entertainers, that's what! Putting on a show—"

"Using our skill and science to help those poor devils from the front lines to a few moments of escape," Lundgren interrupted. "Men and officers half shattered by shellfire and bombing and mines. What better could our blasted science do? What better end to our experiments, our knowledge of electronics, the talents that God gave us?"

Cosgrave uttered a low groan and slumped down.

"I know. You're quite right. I'm ashamed of myself."

He was, too. Bitterly he wished that he had Lundgren's calm appraisal of things, instead of a lot of tortured nerves. Yet the two men were complementary; they fitted together admirably, even in their work.

What they had done with radar and its kindred devices of electrons and waves from nowhere, was well known. Shunted from the Navy by a series of accidents and thrown in with this Eighth Army, the experiments they were carrying on had ended. Nothing mattered now to the invasion forces

a STAFF

by H. Bedford-Jones

except getting ahead. Cosgrave and Lundgren, whether they liked it or not, were put to most desperate use of their talents and late findings in their experiments.

That famed Experiment 999, which turned time backward, had become fabulous. This was about the only thing they could do now—this strange play of electronic forces which they had happened on by accident, which they themselves did not understand in the least. By the Army at large, it was considered as some sort of Yankee trick, a form of cinema—which it certainly was not.

Putting on a show! In the light of Lundgren's comment Cosgrave knew his phrase to be pitifully unjust. He lifted his head.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "What about supper?"

"We'd better get moving," Lundgren rejoined in his calm, even way. "A bunch of the Royal Engineers, just back from the front lines on relief, are having us over for grub. They've hooked on to a power-line and are coming any moment now to get our truck. That Headquarters liaison chap of ours, McNally, asked me to give 'em the works tonight."

"Oh, all right. . . He's a good guy. St. Louis man, isn't he?" Cosgrave stirred restlessly. "I did talk like a fool, didn't I?"

"Wait till you see these engineer chaps," Lundgren told him. "They're holding on by sheer will-power and accomplishing the impossible. Hello! Sounds like their outfit coming now to get our stuff. Come along!"

That night, as he and Lundgren made ready for their show, Cosgrave was stirred again by the worn haggard faces crowded around. They were English, Canadians, all sorts, even one or two American officers from the Headquarters staff. News had just come in about the heavy fighting at Monte Cassino, on the other side of Italy. The tension here was terrific. If surcease could be given these men, even for an hour, it would be a great and valuable work that they did.

"Here," said Lundgren, pointing to the huge screen that had been erected. "Keep your eye on this, men. I don't know what will come; nobody knows. It's not a cinema, nor radar, but electronic work of some sort that we struck during some of our experiments."

"Where does it come from, sir?" asked a voice.

Lundgren smiled.

"Ask me something easy," he replied, then paused. "Shall I tell you what I think—but can't prove? Then it's this: Short waves from the infinite ether are brought in and collected; sounds and scenes of the remote past are picked up and brought together on the screen. The oscillations—Ready, John? Let her go, then."

Cosgrave snapped on the switches and waited, his hand on the control dials. A staff major, close by, named Barnes, spoke up.

"All right to talk, is it?"

"Until you're interrupted," said Cosgrave. "Look! It's taking hold!"

Murmurs of excited interest arose. A fat blue spark was leaping across the panels; the queer electron tubes, with a special thickness of crystal quartz wafers, were all aglow, and across the big screen faint colors were playing. These, as Cosgrave turned the dials, for a fleeting instant fell into shape: A bit of landscape developed; hill and upland and villages showed. An exclamation escaped Major Barnes.

"I say, I know that place! It's the village of Pescina—or Cerfennia, in Roman times. Mentioned in that Claudian milestone the chaps turned up—"

Someone passed the word that Barnes knew all this country intimately, had spent long years here. But already the scene had disappeared and the screen showed only vague masses of drifting, changing color.

"What we'll see and hear," Cosgrave said, "will probably be something in that vicinity—something that happened in the past, a hundred or a thousand or two thousand years ago. I don't know what to expect any more than you do. If—"

HE broke off abruptly; a startling thing happened. Another voice impacted upon his, but this voice came from the screen, where something white was taking shape.

"Not for curses, bribes or tears will I change the plans!" it said in steely tones.

A man took shape; he wore a white toga edged with rich scarlet-purple, and he was as harshly intolerant as the voice. A handsome man, calmly proud, even arrogant, with his beaked Roman nose, firm mouth and the driving power of his level eyes. A young man, but filled with authority, conscious that his every word would be obeyed to the utmost. For he was Rome; and he knew it, and others knew it.

"The roads of Rome do not turn for tree or house or hill," he went on. "Tear down the silly thing. We seek utility, not beauty. Drive on the road straight for the mark ahead."

"So the noble Marcus Valerius Messala will not listen to me!" spoke the cracked and feeble voice of an old man. "Perhaps he will listen to the noble lady who owns the property and the little shrine, or to the local deity honored by the shrine?"

Valerius made some answer, but his words faded out. He too faded, and

the screen was only a tossing mass of color again.

Major Barnes spoke up in an awed voice.

"I don't savvy this! Was that the Valerius chap who built the road to Cerfennia? But that was long before Claudius ran it on to the sea. . . That was a hundred and fifty years before Christ!"

Nobody made response. Already something else was taking shape—not a man, but a scene. Here beneath an olive tree two men, stripped to the waist, were at work with a plane-table. On the screen unfolded a busy scene—a hundred or more slaves at work on piles of stone; other groups digging, others carrying rubble. The whips of overseers cracked; mournful chants came from the slaves tamping down bits of the roadway; here and there Roman soldiers stood about. One group of them were avidly throwing dice.

The scene broadened. Off to the right, where the stakes and cords marking the line of road ceased, appeared a little group of trees with a gleam of marble amid the green, where a small but exquisitely designed shrine stood. Past this, on a rising slope, showed the fields and buildings of a farm or villa.

The two men at the table.—Greek slaves whose brains worked for their masters.—halted work. One yawned.

"Nice weather, Agias. Well, I suppose that pretty shrine and those fine trees must go. Our Valerius is a bitter hard man, eh?"

"But just," said the other. "And remember, this is enemy country. These people hate Rome and all Romans. Valerius may get his throat cut some night."

"Not he! I'd hate to be the man to try it. No, he's of the highest rank; they say he'll be censor next elections, and the soldiers worship him. Such a man is favored of the gods. . . Here he comes."

They bent to work again, as Valerius approached.

"What became of that old man I was talking with?" he demanded.

"I didn't notice," Agias replied. "I thought he passed in among those trees."

"Hm! Well, out go those oaks and the shrine; get at it tomorrow. You, Creon—I know that look of yours. What's in your mind?"

HARSH as ever were his words, but there was a faint smile in his eyes, for he liked this agile Greek from Corinth.

Creon looked at him and nodded.

"I was thinking, master, that the little building must be a shrine to some local god, and to destroy it may bring the anger of the god upon us."

"Bosh!" Valerius broke into a laugh. "This is the country of the Marsi—a stubborn people. I hear they've tried to form a league against Rome. Well, let their gods do what they can! I'll match them with the deities of Rome, any day. Agias, send for the foreman in charge of that last piece of finished road; have him come to my tent at once. . . Hello! Now what?"

A slave, as his collar attested, was coming at a trot from the direction of the trees. He came up, saluted Valerius, and spoke in very bad Latin.

"Most noble Valerius, my mistress Gracia, owner of these lands, asks that you come to her at the shrine yonder, where she is awaiting you."

"If there's any argument about the road," said Valerius, "my surveyors here will take it up with her freedman who manages her property. The right of way is all settled."

"My mistress speaks as a noble lady to a Roman of senatorial rank," said the slave.

Anger at the reproof swept Valerius. "Your tongue would be improved by a dozen lashes on your back," he began hotly; then checked himself. After all, it was deserved. A laugh came to his lips. "Very well. Tell your mistress that I'll be there in five minutes." He turned to the two Greeks. "Have that rascal of a foreman wait for me at my tent, until I return."

He strode off to the tent spread at a little distance. The slave went back as he had come. The two surveyors exchanged a look, and abruptly Creon chuckled.

"That was a hot one! These people of the old Latin tribes look down on the Romans as barbarians— Those words stung him, eh?"

"Oh, he's not half bad, for a Roman," said Creon. "We of Greece—we, too, regard the Romans as barbarians. And Greece is in chains to Rome."

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

"Could your road not turn aside a little?" asked Gracia.

"Bah! Because the gods failed us, Creon!"

"They don't fail men who don't fail themselves."

Marcus Valerius, who was not a philosopher at all, went to his tent, stripped, ducked his head in a bucket of water, and washed. He had donned his toga for the purpose of impressing a deputation of citizens from Cerfennia. Disdaining to impress a woman, he donned work-clothes, a farmer's hat of horsehair and straw, buckled on his sword-belt, and went forth—a far better-looking person, had he but known it, for almost unconsciously he laid arrogance aside with the toga of senatorial rank.

SHE was sitting before the little shrine. Slaves had brought a chair for her, and one for Valerius. Amusement sat in her eyes as he approached and saluted her.

"So you are no longer of senatorial rank!" she said in excellent Latin.

"I am what I am, lady," he rejoined. His eyes searched her curiously, and were well repaid. In her flowing Greek garments she deserved her name; she was not beautiful, but her features were alive, tender, quietly strong, full of womanly charm. She gestured toward the other chair; he refused with a shrug. Amusement deepened in her eyes.

"What, afraid you'll not impress me favorably? Your rugged barbarian strength is well known to me, so why bother?"

He bit his lip and took the chair, with a slight flush. He was a young man, after all.

"Why must you destroy this little shrine?" Gracia asked quietly.

"The road takes precedence of everything, lady. Your manager sold us the right to go where we will."

"True; otherwise you'd have taken it by right of force. This is a shrine erected long ago to the rustic deity of these valleys, named Imeus," she said. "He is the god of shepherds and flocks and green growing things, of kindness and beauty and peace. Could your road not turn aside a little, to spare his shrine?"

"No, lady. The road must run straight," said he curtly. "Why do you come to me? Why not send your husband?"

"I have none to send, Marcus Valerius. We people of the Marsi, whom you have conquered, do not keep our women at home to spin and cook, as you do. Or does your wife not care about—"

"What is that to you, woman? I have no wife," he said roughly, "and want none."

He was trying to be very Roman—curt and crude and full of authority. Her slight smile disconcerted him.

"I feel sorry for you, Marcus Valerius," she said.

"Save your sorrow until you are asked for it," he replied. "Imeus! That was the name of the old man who talked to me a while ago. A countryman—a curious old fellow."

"It is a common name hereabouts." She pointed to the high mountain in the east. "That mountain is named Imeus, for the deity. Many people are named for him, also. If you destroy his shrine, I fear the gods will be angry."

"I am not interested in the little gods of country folk," said he.

"Ah, but all gods are alike, under different names—yours and mine, Roman. A force of nature, identified with some person of past history, is finally worshiped by his or her name. The earth-goddess is the same, by whatever name she is worshiped. And there is a saying hereabouts, that any impious man who harms a shrine of Imeus comes to an unhappy end."

Was there warning in her voice—or threat? He could not be sure. She angered him, and yet something in her air, in her personality, drew him and stirred his heart and moved his admiration. He regretted having been so rough and positive. Her slim hands, her slim fine features, the curiously serene depths in her eyes— What a pity she was not a Roman! But after all, she was only a woman of a conquered Latin tribe.

He rose. "These trees must go, this shrine must go. The road turns aside for nothing," he said curtly, and went striding back along the way to his tent where sentries stood. He did not look back, for he saw the construction foreman awaiting him. He shoved her out of his mind and thought, though he could not shove her out of his memory.

He seated himself in a chair outside his tent and crooked his finger at the foreman, a slim dark man with tragic eyes, Crispus by name.

"Now, my friend," he said grimly, "you know that I am a hard man, sparing neither rewards nor punishments. You have worked on this road a full year with me. What is the first step in building the road?"

"Cutting the parallel trenches, Marcus Valerius, and removing the earth until the foundation is reached," replied Crispus. He was a Roman citizen and therefore entitled to certain rights and privileges, but a slight pallor rose in his face as he met the probing gaze of Valerius.

"And then?"

"Ramming down a firm bed for the road, of flat stones and earth."

"And then?"

"Then come the four layers of the road itself. Stones set in mortar; above this rubble masonry or concrete, finer concrete above this, and finally the pavement of five-sided blocks of hard stone perfectly fitted together."

"And then?"

"There is no more," said Crispus, "unless you mean the side paving."

"No. I mean the last thing of all, which is also the first—honesty." Marcus Valerius eyed the man darkly. "The thickness is supposed to be three feet, the width is fourteen. You rascal! You've been cheating on the width and thickness and your supposedly fine concrete is miserable trash."

"Lord, I have done my best—"

"You lie," said Valerius. "You've been dealing in slaves on the side. You've replaced some of our strong workmen from the slave camp, with weak fellows picked up by those slave-dealing friends of yours. I have the proofs. The slave-dealers have told me all."

Crispus dropped on his knees and stretched forth his hand. His eyes were tragic.

"Lord, I confess," he cried out. "Have mercy! For these three months my wife has lain abed sick, and the two children have been a charge, and debts have mounted up. Have mercy, and I will repay all! You know well I have done good work, and now I shall be able to make repayment!"

Valerius beckoned two of his soldiers.

"This man is a Roman citizen," he said, "and therefore cannot be tried for his life or on capital charges except at Rome. But I happen to be a Roman citizen also. Take him back to the road-construction camp. Bid two of the stoutest slaves whip him out of camp and a full mile down the road, and let them lay on the lash hard. He will be replaced by his assistant."

"May the gods do even unto you as you do to me!" yelled out Crispus, in sudden frantic horror. "You know well this means death to me! May the gods curse you for a cruel—"

His speech was cut short as one of the soldiers hit him across the mouth.

THE hapless foreman was dragged away, howling, and Marcus Valerius felt better. He saw his two surveyors passing with a ground-crew, and watched them. The stakes and cords were laid out, on to the shrine and its group of trees, and through to the other side. On the morrow, the demolition crew would clear the way.

Valerius remained here in his tent that evening, going over the accounts, instead of going back to the construction camp. That gang of slaves and soldiers oppressed him; the centurion was a good fellow, but no companion, and this was a cool and pleasant spot of an evening. Safe enough, too. Much as the country folk hated Ro-

mans, a few soldiers could hold them in awe; and Valerius held the country people of this Marsi tribe in the greatest contempt.

He finished his work and stepped outside. The cool moonlight tempted him. He spoke to the sentry.

"I'm going for a walk."

"Better take me, Valerius," said the sentry. "This is no safe country for a Roman to wander in, at night."

"Stay here. I'm only going along the road. These people would never dare lay hand on any Roman—why, their whole tribe would be sold into slavery if they did!"

True enough. A mere insult to a Roman had brought entire kingdoms to ruin.

Valerius walked along that arrow-straight road, on to the new stakes and cords, on to the clump of trees and the shrine. It stood empty and beautiful in the moonlight, a small marble altar half surrounded by graceful pillars and a low roof. He stood staring at it and his memory pictured her sitting there. . . Gracia! A perfect name!

SHE fitted into this place. Perhaps under the spell of moonlight, his Roman training melted; he ceased to sneer at beauty. Instead, he became aware of it. For the first time in his life, he sensed what beauty was and could mean. All he had known in life was efficiency, hard and practical and materialistic and brutal. Here was something beyond and above the spirit of Rome.

"And how much more beautiful," he murmured, "when she was sitting here!"

"Quite true, my friend," said the cracked, aged voice of the old countryman. Turning, he saw the figure of Imeus, staff in hand, coming toward him. "I heard your words, Marcus Valerius Messala. You are right. There are few such women in the world."

"So it's you again! What are you doing here, old man?"

"Looking for the last time on the beauty you mean to destroy tomorrow, and getting water from the spring of Imeus."

The old man lifted a jug and drank, and set the jug down, and leaned on his staff.

"After all, I have some right here," he went on. "This is my country, as Rome is yours; and it is a pleasant country."

"That's why Rome has taken it," said Valerius, with a short laugh.

"Yes, no doubt. Young man, you interest me: I never knew a Roman to have any perception of beauty. May I offer you a drink of cold water from Mount Imeus?"

He lifted the jug. Valerius took it, and by force of habit spilled a few drops by way of libation to the gods, and drank. It was excellent water.

A cackling laugh came from Imeus.

"You give thanks to the god, and destroy his shrine! Well done, Roman! . . . . Do you have Mysteries at Rome?"

"Why, yes," said Valerius. "Just as in Greece and in Egypt."

"But not the same . . . not the same. Your people do not believe in a life beyond the grave; for you there is no resurrection."

Valerius laughed again. "Scarcely. Once dead, dead indeed!"

"Aye; once dead, your people are indeed dead—and shall be. But Greece and Egypt shall never die, my friend. Would you like to know the essence of their Mysteries, their secret lore known only to the initiates?"

"You talk like a lunatic. What do I care about such things?"

"You care about beauty; you can be awakened. And therefore I shall give you, who destroy my shrine, a message to torment you in the years to come, an understanding of what might have been and can never be. I do not deal in revenge and hatred, Roman; but I shall bestow upon you the most terrible of all ills—vain regret."

Valerius looked scornfully at the old figure.

"You fool! Who are you, that you dare to talk thus to me?"

"I am Imeus," said the old man slowly.

Valerius laughed.

"And I am Marcus Valerius Messala, you old rascal."

"Whose name shall live in this Via Valeria you are building, eh? You are unsteady on your feet, my friend. Drink again."

Unsteady? Yes; Valerius had the feeling of something wrong. His throat burned. He lifted the jug and gulped the cold water; but his hand was unsteady, too. The jug escaped from his grip and fell, shattering on the marble.

"What is it?" He passed a hand across his eyes, but they would not clear. He had a glimpse of shadowy figures, and peered uncertainly at them. Men or mere fancy? He heard Imeus utter another cackle of amusement.

"Water from the fountain of Imeus, Roman! Men say it has a queer effect upon the senses. Mortals cannot drink the water of the gods, nor endure the blinding light of the heavens."

A hoarse, strangled cry of rage escaped the Roman. Too late, he saw that he had been duped and drugged. Those shadowy shapes were closing in around him; they were men, not fancy. He tried to shout, but could only utter a croak. He fumbled for his sword, and could not find the hilt. His heart felt as though it were bursting within him. . . .

His next memory was of walking across a wooded glade in the moonlight. Somewhere an owl was hooting dismally. His wrists were bound; men were around him and the sharp point of a javelin prodded him from behind. Old Imeus strode in advance, staff in hand, ragged garments fluttering under the moon.

Valerius stumbled. The javelin prodded more deeply. Stung by the pain, his energies aroused, the Roman suddenly whipped around. He caught the javelin in his bound hands and wrested it clear. The figures closed in with chattering cries, and weapons glinted. He thrust with the javelin and felt the keen point drive home. A man screamed. Something struck him from behind, blow upon blow. He thrust again, and the javelin went into a man and was wrested from his hand as the man fell. Then he had a glimpse of old Imeus swinging the long staff and striking him with it—heavy, lusty blows on head and shoulders. A man jumped on him and he fell; and with the crash everything went dark.

PAIN aroused him. He stood against a tree; his arms were around it, and his wrists were tied. The blows of a whip were falling on his back; he could feel the warm blood trickling. Then they ceased, and Imeus stepped around in front of him, aged features grinning in the moonlight.

"So, proud Roman, you have come down to the level of other men!" said the old man—if man he were. "You are not greatly harmed, but the arrogant pride is scourged out of you. That is the first step in the Mysteries. He who would become a Magus must learn to endure pain and humility. Here; drink and be refreshed. It is water and wine."

He held a cup to the lips of Valerius, who drank avidly, careless if the cup were drugged; but it was not. His senses cleared, his brain came back to normal.

The lash! He, a Roman, whipped like a slave! This burned into him.

"Your tribe shall pay for this, you old lunatic," he said. "Fire and sword shall sweep the Marsi into slavery!"

"I think not." Imeus leaned on his staff and looked Valerius in the face. "Now I am going to tell you, in few words, all the teachings of the Mysteries, my friend. You have never heard of resurrection from the dead. You do not know that man, like trees and flowers and other life, lives anew with the cycle of time. To you, the body is everything; you do not know that there is a real You, a Self, which is eternal."

"Not for curses, bribes or tears will I change the plans!"

"Madman!" spat out Valerius furiously. A whipcord sang in air and thudded across his back. He spat an oath and tugged vainly at his wristbonds.

"Here, then, is the great secret of the wise men," went on Imeus, "taught them by the gods in ancient days and preserved in the Mysteries. Man must descend to the depths, before he can start his journey toward the heights. That is all. . . . Before he can attain resurrection—what? Why, death, of course. Every initiate into the Mysteries must learn this great lesson. The conquest of death—that is it. Now my friend, you must taste of death, before you reach immortality. But first, the evil must be burned out of you with fire—that is the next step in the initiation."

Two of the old man's followers came into sight, holding burning torches.

To Valerius, the truth was evident. This old madman and some of the country folk meant to torture and kill him; and there was no help. He drew himself up; let them do it, then! There would be payment of the bitterest, later on, and meantime he would die like a Roman.

"That is good, very good," said Imeus approvingly. "My friend, there is much evil in you to be burned away. Do you know what evil is? It is only good that has become warped and twisted awry. The chemical substances in man are all good, but some of them are ill-adjusted and turn against each other and work for evil. The structure that holds you together, the atomic structure of your being, becomes unbalanced: that is evil. Fire must burn it away and restore you to yourself. . . . Put the torches to him!"

THE men moved forward. Valerius cursed them savagely but did not move as the smoking torches were thrust at him. The fumes choked him, the flames of fire burned him—Then he heard a sudden loud cry from the men; the two holding the torches were dashed aside, the torches fell.

His eyes cleared. He saw her standing there confronting Imeus—the woman Gracia, her gentle features contorted by anger and indignation. Men appeared behind her, farm slaves and freedmen. Those with Imeus took to flight with cries of fear. But old Imeus stood face to face with her, leaning on his staff, and laughing.

"Who are you?" she cried out. "How dare you do this thing, old man! To torture and kill a helpless creature . . . why, you are worse than the Romans themselves!"

"No, lady; no, gentle Gracia," said the old madman. "You have come, as I willed, and what remains is in your hands. I leave Marcus Valerius Messala to you."

He turned away. A cry broke from her.

"Stop him! Stop him!"

The old man looked at her over his shoulder, and smiled.

"How can they stop me?" he said. "I am *Imeus*, my daughter."

Whether the name struck them, or whether some of them knew him, was hard to say. At all events, he strode away and passed through their circle, and disappeared among the trees, Gracia staring after him. Then she whipped around; they came at her bidding, and at length Valerius was freed.

"Come, help him to the villa," she ordered. "One of you run ahead. Tell the women to have bandages and warm water ready, and salve for wounds."

Later, Valerius lay in a low-timbered room. Lamps burned near by. Over him worked Gracia and her women, and he marveled at her. Since his childhood he had not experienced such deft kindness, such utter tenderness. Words of pity were on her lips, and her fingers touched him with a cool healing touch, and from her was evoked such beauty and sweetness that he thought she must be some goddess in mortal guise. He murmured as much, and she smiled and stooped, and kissed his cheek.

"No, my poor Roman, just a woman who is sorry for you. Here, drink this wine, then we'll finish the bandaging."

The wine heartened him. He could not take his eyes from her; her tenderness was all revealed to him, and he felt humbled before her. When the bandages were finished, she stood looking down at him a while, and then she smiled.

"Shall we leave you now, to sleep?"

"I don't want to sleep, lady," he said. "I'd like to lie here while you talk with me. And will you send a slave to my tent, to tell my guards I am safe and will return in the morning?"

"That has already been done, Marcus Valerius," she replied. "Yes, if you like, I'll stay and talk with you, while I sew up the holes torn in your garments."

Her cool fingers touched his face; he kissed them, and she smiled.

She sat beside him, sewing, talking, telling him about herself and her quiet life here, asking him about Rome and not seeming to like particularly what he said about it. He gained a quick opening glimpse of how real and peaceful and honest was this country life. After all, his people were of Sabine extraction, though living in Rome since his ancestor Publius Valerius became consul in the very first year of the Republic. Farm life was in his blood.

AS he lay, all the stern ideals he had been taught faded away and lost appeal. The thought of Roman matrons, contrasted with this Latin woman, no less proud than they but infinitely more tender, was unpleasant. The thought of Rome itself was steadfast; but life there, and life here among the Latin hills, were very different things. Could he win the heart of a woman such as this, could he give up politics and senatorial squabbles, and throw himself into such a life as this, Rome might be well forsaken!

These reflections played at the back of his mind, while he watched her in the lamplight and listened to the quiet cadences of her voice and felt the serenity of her inner self stealing around him.

"I am sorry that I was rude to you today," he said abruptly. "I should not like you to remember me in that way."

"I shan't, Marcus," she replied, and smiled at his quick question:

"How shall you remember me, then?"

"How shall I remember you? Why, as one who might be worthy of all honor, were he not a Roman; as one to cherish and befriend, were he not a Roman; as one whose heart might hold beauty and nobility, were he not a Roman."

"So, proud Roman, you have come down to the level of other men!" said the old man.

"You really seem to think Romans are poor creatures, Gracia!" he said, nettled.

"I do. They may conquer the world, yet they are poor creatures in some ways. One pities them. You're the best among them, I should say—one who might be a friend."

"One who is a friend if you'll have him."

"Why not?" she replied softly. "Now sleep, good friend."

She leaned forward and kissed him; he longed to clasp her to him, and dared not. Then she went, and darkness came upon the room, and the world seemed empty to him without her presence.

Sleep he could not, for thought of her. Swift fancies darted through his mind: he would divert the course of the road and spare the shrine of Imeus; he must give orders to that effect in the morning. He would start the political machinery at work and get a post here in these Latin hills, perhaps at Cerfennia.

The senate would undoubtedly be glad to put him in magisterial charge of this district, where a revolt of the Latin tribes was always to be feared. He could buy a farm hereabouts, and build with Grecian slaves a villa that would be a fitting home for her beauty. . .

So he slept, and did not awaken until the sun was up. And when he wakened, it was to wonder if all that night had been a dream. No, he was here.

A man appeared.

"I am the freedman Enna, Lord. Food is ready, and a horse, and I shall escort you back to your men."

"Where is the lady Gracia?" he asked quickly.

"Gone to Cerfennia, Lord, to market."

"Oh! Then tell her, when she returns, that I shall come again to thank her for her kindness . . . perhaps tomorrow."

SOONER than that, he thought; eagerly; why delay? He ate, and rode back to the road—then drew rein upon reaching the shrine of Imeus. The trees were down, and men were tearing the shrine to pieces, with Creon directing them.

"What do you mean by this?" he cried angrily.

Creon saluted him and stood staring.

"Why, master—you yourself gave the order!"

"True," he replied, and rode on to camp, cursing his own headstrong folly. Too late now—the trees were chopped down, and the shrine in complete ruin.

He could walk; his bandages were invisible under his toga; he said nothing about the attack upon him. He began to doubt whether he had not dreamed a good deal of it. But he sent off to headquarters for certain things belonging to him—a fine cup of gold adorned with dolphins of carven silver, among them. He would send her the princely gift that was her due, he reflected, and follow them himself, in the afternoon. He could not wait to see her!

While waiting for the things to come, he found Creon trying to fit together a broken jar. At his question, the Greek smiled.

"Why, master, this is a jar of the type found only in very ancient tombs! Look at the paintings upon it: an old man with a staff, and words in an unknown language!"

"Where did you find the jar?" Valerius demanded quickly. He already guessed what the answer would be.

"It was lying on the marble floor of the little shrine, master, broken to bits. It must be a thousand years old, made before the memory of man."

Valerius turned away and looked up for a long while at the towering mass of Mount Imeus against the clear sky. Singular thoughts struggled in him. . . . But, no, no! That old rascal had been a lunatic, a wandering madman. Nothing else was possible. That was all nonsense, about the gods coming to earth in the shape of men. It just didn't happen in these modern days.

His things arrived. He sent off a decurion and four soldiers with the gift, which was handsome and impressive. He was going over reports, half an hour later, when the decurion, who was mounted, came riding back at a gallop and burst into the tent.

"Marcus! Marcus Valerius! Look there, you can see it—"

Valerius sprang up, followed the pointing arm, and saw a thin column of smoke lifting into the distant sky. The decurion answered his hasty question.

"The farm, the villa of the Lady Gracia! The buildings were all ablaze. Nobody was there except an old man leaning on a staff—he said she had gone away and would not return, everybody had gone away."

An old man leaning on a staff! Valerius choked back an oath.

"Decurion! Take your whole squad, and go to Cerfennia. Inquire. Find her, locate her, and bring me word."

That evening the decurion returned from a bootless errand. He had been able to learn nothing. Valerius sent his centurion with fifty horsemen to offer rewards and bribes; they could only find that the Lady Gracia had departed, none knew whither.

Valerius himself rode out to the site of the villa and could discover nothing but desolation; every sign of life here had gone. He stood for a long while gazing at the ruins; heavily and more heavily grew the remembrance of those words old Imeus had cackled at him:

"To you who destroy my shrine . . . . an understanding of what might have been and can never be . . . . the most terrible of all ills—vain regret."

And in later days, when he became censor and moved on to the highest offices in Rome, he built a tomb for himself on the Appian Way and ordered three words carved upon it: *Ornatus Ex Virtutibus*, or "Rewarded According to his Merits." But no one understood what was meant by the inscription.

THE screen fell into a formless play of colors. From the watching soldiers came a breath of relaxation, a murmur of words. Cosgrave switched off the power and heard the voice of Major Barnes, at his elbow.

"Curious, old chap! I could recognize some of those very spots. . . . I spent a summer tracing the Via Valeria, you know."

"Hanged if I can understand this thing," spoke out another man. "Do you recall what that old bloke with the staff said about atomic structure and so forth? Well, I didn't know the belief was so ancient, but it rather tallies with what a good many of our metaphysics Johnnies say today—"

"Atomic structure wasn't known back in ancient days!" cried a voice, and then they were all off in brisk argument.

Lundgren came up, met the gaze of Cosgrave, and spoke softly.

"Nice work, John, nice work. They've forgotten all about the blood-stained mud."

"Don't thank me," said Cosgrave.

The other nodded.

"I know. . . . Nice work, all the same. Better than vain regrets, eh?"

Cosgrave met his eyes for a moment, and smiled assent.

Nightingale in Port

"WHO is the old cow?" The girl asked the question loudly, in all the triumph of her flashing conquest over the group of naval officers surrounding her on the veranda of the Port Said hotel. Her slim form had swiveled in the direction of that fat object in yellow satin. Her dark Levantine eyes looked scornfully at the rheumy eyes of the old woman.

"Some say she's an opera singer," laughed Lieutenant Boyle, R.N.V.R.

"I'll bet she only croaked her way through fourth-rate cabarets, and even then was hissed off," said the girl, raising her pink gin with a smile to the lieutenant.

"There you're wrong, my dear," said the elderly Commander Rawlings, who seemed to be in the group by mistake. "She has been a very famous singer in her time."

"In her time! That's good, sir," dared one of the youngsters.

"In my time too," said Rawlings quietly. "I remember her at Covent Garden as a wonderful *Marguerite* in 'Faust.' She was with the Italians. They came over from the Scala in Milan. But I think her finest effort was in 'Madame Butterfly' when—"

A general laugh drowned the reminiscence, in the midst of which one of the officers said.

"Puccini is just sentimental punk. Sorry, sir, but all that seems as out-of-date as your opera singer."

"Well, I may be old-fashioned, but—"

"What does she call herself?" interrupted the girl.

"But didn't you know? She's the Marquise de la Fossette. But I say! She's coming over here," said Rawlings, excitedly jumping to his feet.

The fat bundle in yellow satin had waddled forward, a little painfully. She bent toward the young girl, who was seated in her chair and displaying to advantage her lissom legs.

"My dear, as an old artiste—the Marquise de la Fossette, you know—I wish to congratulate you on your delightful dance act which I saw in the cabaret the other evening. It was worthy of a better place."

"Thank you," said the girl sullenly.

"I think you'll go far, my dear," went on the heavily powdered face, which cracked a smile at the standing group of naval officers. "Have a good time, but remember that art matters most. Only when you've lost your art, will you realize that you've lost life itself. *Au 'voir, messieurs.*"

And with a final automatic smile which seemed to leave a cloud of cheap perfume in its wake, she waddled away.

"That's what I call a backhanded compliment to you, Jeanne," laughed Harry Boyle in the short silence that followed. "Your dance worthy of a better place, eh?"

"*Une vache!*" snapped the Levantine girl. "She would not herself earn a millième at the Eastern Exchange—the best cabaret in Port Said. She aspires too much."

"And perspires," chuckled one of the others. "All that rot about art! I'd rather see your legs flashing about the floor any day than hear the croaking of that ancient nightingale."

"Shut your silly mouth," said the girl, and drained her glass.

"I think more drinks are indicated," said Boyle, clapping his hands. A waiter smirked forward. "By the way, what's happened to old Rawlings?"

"Who knows? Who cares?" drawled a youngster, tapping his teeth with a pipe.

"Same again—with one out," Boyle told the waiter, indicating the empty glasses, and thrilling once again at the crossed legs and short skirt of the girl. And he told himself defiantly: "I'm going to marry this wench. Why not? It's wartime, and anything goes. I liked the way she told that young fool to shut his mouth."

Nobody missed the gray-haired Commander Rawlings. If they did, it was only to admire his tact in leaving young people to themselves. Actually, he had followed that absurd waddling bundle of yellow satin into the dim and faded splendor of the hotel lounge. He was astonished at his own effrontery, and even timid of it as he accosted her.

"Marquise—" he began.

"Yes, monsieur?"

She looked up, surprised.

"I—I want to say that I considered it most kind of you to come over and praise that girl's dancing—er—after—"

"After she called me an old cow, *hein?*"

"So you heard?"

"Earning a living by singing gives one acute ears," she said. "And even supposing I couldn't lip-read, the girl's glance had enough contempt in it to tell everything."

"And yet you could repay such a remark with kindness," murmured Rawlings.

"To be kind costs nothing," she said. "And believe me, I was sincere. She *is* a good dancer."

"But not an artiste in the same class as yourself, Marquise," said Rawlings, enthusiasm in his voice. "Why, I remember one night at Covent Garden—you were singing *Mimi* in 'La Bohème!' The audience wouldn't let you leave the stage after the first act."

The fat figure seemed transformed. Life came to those dull blue eyes that a moment ago had looked like cheap beads. The wrinkled throat seemed to swallow.

"So you've heard me sing?"

"Many times, Marquise. I was one of your many devoted if unknown admirers."

"What a pity one meets only the false and known admirers, the jealous and the self-seeking!" she said. "But then, that is the life of an opera singer—as false as the romance we sing about."

"You made *Mimi* a real heroine," he said, unabashed.

"My coughing, no doubt, was excellent," she said, permitting herself a grin. "You see, I—"

AT that same moment a paroxysm of coughing seized the Marquise. The yellow satin deflated like a pricked balloon. The blue eyes screwed and spurted tears. Beneath the plastered face the complexion became purple. She doubled up, spluttering and wheezing. Rawlings stood aghast.

But only for a moment. The explosion appeared to be the cue for the entrance of a tall thin man buttoned together tightly in an old-fashioned black suit and apparently suffocating in a black cravat pierced with a pearl pin. He glared angrily at Rawlings, and then put out gloved hands to the wheezing balloon of satin.

"Marquise!" he said, reproachfully. "You have disobeyed orders again. *Ma foi*, you will kill yourself."

"It is nothing," she wheezed. "The excitement of meeting a friend. Please help me to my room."

The thin sallow-faced man was already supporting her with his gloved hands. But she stretched out a podgy arm to Rawlings.

"You will come also, *hein?* It is so very comforting to find friends in Port Said Do not mind my manager

Said

Illustrated by RAYMOND SISLEY

The story of a woman who sang while the bombs fell.

by WILLIAM MAKIN

Who wrote "Desert Nurse" and "The Red Wolf of Arabia."

here. He has been soured by too much opera."

And with a cackle at her own joke, she began slowly and painfully to ascend the staircase. The two men supported her.

The Kursaal Palace Hotel seemed to have been affected by the same blight of war that had descended upon Port Said itself. The closing of the Canal, except for the passage of an occasional warship and troopship, had brought desperation to the touts of the city and an even more vicious despair to the painted faces that peered down wearily upon the deserted and unswept streets. Only the balloons, floating in a barrage across that straight ditch between the desert, looked fat and prosperous.

The bedroom, into which Rawlings and the buttoned-up man ushered the still wheezing bundle of satin, was typical of the Kursaal Palace. The dead or live cockroach was on the boarded floor. The strip of faded carpet by the bed seemed to have been placed there as an afterthought. The water in the decanter or bottle on the table could only be seen through a dirty glass, darkly. And the mosquito-net draping the bed gave a forlorn and cobwebby appearance to the whole room.

"I'll lie on the bed for a little while," gasped the Marquise. "Paul,

will you take this gentleman into my sitting-room and give him a drink?"

Rawlings found himself ushered through a folding door draped with a tattered apology for a curtain. This room, too, was sparsely furnished. A few photographs of the Marquise de la Fossette were pinned against the plastered walls. They had obviously been taken from silver frames. Rawlings speculated as to what had happened to the frames. A table, three chairs of a type that might have been thrown overboard from ships and washed up on the shores of Egypt, a clock that had stopped at five minutes to two, and another strip of haphazard carpet completed the furnishings. A cheap, portable phonograph was on the floor. A plate of false teeth rested in a half-filled glass of water.

The buttoned-up man had materialized with a bottle of cheap Greek brandy. He poured a little into a dirty glass, added water from a bottle, and hurried back into the bedroom. While he was administering to the Marquise, Rawlings stared out of the window. It overlooked that mournful lost beach of Port Said where the Mediterranean rolled in with the color and appearance of a chocolate soufflé. The opening to the Canal with its fishing feluccas, its busy naval launches and a tug fussing with the boom, flanked this panorama. Standing on his pedestal, dressed in frock coat and gesturing to the south, was the green-copper figure of De Lesseps. Rawlings sighed. As Port Captain, the scene was all too deadly familiar to him. There were moments when he wished the war had never dragged him out of his quiet retirement at Dartmouth.

HE turned, to find the sallow-faced man had returned and was gesturing with the bottle.

"The Marquise is recovering," he said. "She also asks that I beg you to remain a little longer. . . . A drink, monsieur?"

"Thank you," nodded Rawlings.

"I must apologize," went on the funereal figure in careful English, "if I seemed a little—er—hostile, down below. As you see, the Marquise is in very bad health. She needs attention. I, Paul Moissac, her manager," - he bowed—"am now her only friend in this cursed country."

"But that's nonsense," said Rawlings heartily. "I was myself telling the Marquise how much I had enjoyed her singing. I heard her at Covent Garden, and—"

"Hélas! That was the happy past," said the manager, handing a drink to Rawlings. "That was before this war began, before the Marquise had her accident, before we found ourselves prisoners in Port Said."

"Accident? Prisoners? I don't understand."

The buttoned-up figure shrugged and spread out thin, bony hands with the gesture of a pianist about to play a magnificent passage of discord.

"It is a simple story, in effect. Terrible, however, for the Marquise and our career. You have shown yourself a sympathetic Englishman. Let me tell you the story and ease myself of a burden. . . . . At the beginning of the war the Marquise had consented to appear as prima donna for the season at the Cairo Opera House. The terms were tolerable, but not too generous. I did my best for the Marquise. She was to appear in the usual Italian rubbish—'Traviata', 'Tosca', 'Pagliacci', 'Cavalleria Rusticana'." He dismissed them with a contemptuous trill with his fingers on the imaginary piano.

"For a time all went well. Europe was going to war, and Egypt was still far from the conflict. Ourselves, the Marquise and I, thought little of it. It was not amusing, and there was our art to keep us busy. And the Marquise always enjoyed that absurd trilling, those impassioned solos, all that feverish exaltation which the Italians give to their operas and which makes me, a Frenchman, sick."

"I rather like the Italian operas," protested Rawlings.

"You are not alone," said the Frenchman tolerantly. "It makes for us the good business. And the audiences at the Cairo Opera House loved them. The Marquise gave them their money's worth. She was in magnificent form in those early days of the war. I, her manager, used to stand in the shadows and marvel at the sweetness, the purity, the exaltation of a wonderful voice lavished on such musical muck. . . .

"It happened late one evening. It was the last act of 'Tosca'. You know the scene, *hein?* The young lover is lead away to be executed. *Tosca* sings a passionate farewell, and then goes to throw herself from the battlements. Very theatrical, very unwomanly, absurd."

"Decidedly, Italian opera disgusts you," smiled Rawlings.

The grave buttoned-up figure ignored the interjection.

"I could see from my place in the shadows that the Marquise was having difficulties with the score. Each note became an effort. She was always proud of her capacity to lift her voice above the noisiest of orchestras—and that cursed Cairo orchestra was one of the noisiest I've ever known. Her voice seemed to be lifting in a thin shrill. I could see the agony shining in her face, in her eyes. Perspiration streaked her cheeks, or were they tears of despair? I never knew. To the audience, that agonized expression was magnificent acting. It was right. I sensed their readiness to burst into tumultuous applause as soon as the solo ended. But I also knew something was wrong. I was chilled with sudden fear. I could only watch with horror her throat working convulsively to capture the right note, and sending it forth weak, but triumphant."

SIPPING at his drink, Rawlings was held by the tale told by that sallow-faced man. It was recounted like some nightmare that had seared the memory.

"Thank God, it came at last to an end. She tottered toward the battlements. I rushed behind, and made for the wings. The applause came in a storm. I caught her as she came off the stage. A trickle of blood came from her mouth. 'Paul, I feel dreadfully ill,' she said. I took my handkerchief, and wiped away the blood. 'You must come home at once, Marquise,' I said.

"The roar of the audience, like a wind-whipped sea against high cliffs, sounded in her ears. 'I must go back to my public,' she said. 'They are calling for me.' She took my handkerchief and put it to her mouth again. I sickened at the sight of the red stain. Then she walked with an effort to the front of those red-plush curtains and bowed to the roaring crowd, the handkerchief crushed in her hand."

He stopped, suddenly. The room seemed very quiet. Faintly, from the adjoining room came the wheezing of a woman trying to get back her breath. The silence, stirred by this slight sound, was unendurable.

"Well?" asked Rawlings.

His harsh voice jerked the manager out of the nightmare. He spread out his fingers on a diminuendo.

"It was the beginning of the end. As soon as we reached the flat in Zamalek, I telephoned for a doctor. He came, and was puzzled. 'A little strain, I think,' was all he would say. I knew that he knew nothing. Luckily, I heard that a famous throat specialist was in Cairo on holiday. I begged him to attend the Marquise. He pronounced the verdict. A tumor in the throat; an immediate operation necessary. . . . Within forty-eight hours it was all over. The specialist declared himself satisfied. But he dared not predict for the future. 'All I can say is that the Marquise must not attempt to sing for at least two years. Yes, years. I would suggest also that she remain in Egypt. The air is very good here.'

"It was several weeks before the Marquise could leave the nursing-home. Then I had to tell her the truth. It was like a death sentence. At first she flatly refused. She would sing

"Do as you're told," said the Marquise. "Is it not your business—you, my manager?"

—and die. I went on my knees. At last she listened. She felt so tired, so ill. We had to give up the flat. The Marquise was earning nothing. She had saved nothing. Always she had flung money away, recklessly. Now she had to begin selling the trinkets of jewelry, dresses, furs, everything of luxury. We moved soon after into a cheap quarter of Cairo."

"But were there not friends to help her?" asked Rawlings. "What of her husband, the Marquis de la Fossette? I recollect reading something about him in the French newspapers here, recently."

"The Marquis," said the tightly buttoned-up man with contempt, "remained, as always, in France. The only concern he had with his wife was that she should send him his considerable allowance, regularly. He preferred to rest in the villa at Antibes which she had bought for him."

"You mean to say that he allowed his wife to keep him?" murmured the outraged Englishman.

"It is not unusual," shrugged the manager. "Naturally, he was highly indignant when the Marquise, some time after her accident, found herself unable to send him the usual allowance. He even threatened divorce. But that was not so easy, or immediately profitable. What was easy was to offer his services to the Nazis immediately after the fall of France. He was sent to Paris and given a post on the staff of De Brinon, the Vichy Minister there."

"That's how I came across his name in the newspapers," nodded Rawlings.

"Yes, his complaisance, his willingness to sell France and himself, made his name as notorious as that of Laval. It also had its effect upon ourselves, here in Egypt. When the Fighting French arrived in the Middle East, they did not hesitate to declare their suspicions and show their contempt of the Marquise. Their agents—yes, the Fighting French have their own *Deuxième Bureau*—kept careful watch on our miserable little establishment in Cairo. They reported their suspicions to the British Intelligence. Things became intolerable. We moved to Port Said in the hope of finding a ship that would take us away. The two years' rest is almost ended. Two years of silence. . . . *Mon Dieu,* it has been terrible."

"Terrible!" repeated a voice in the doorway.

Both men looked up with a start. The Marquise de la Fossette stood in the doorway. She had draped herself in a glaring stage kimono, possibly a relic of her rôle as *Madame Butterfly.* She looked more a podgy bundle than ever. In the interval she had also plastered herself with more cosmetics.

They could not hide from the now understanding gaze of Rawlings, the reality of her illness.

"I'm all right, Paul," she said impatiently to the manager who had jumped up. "Don't fuss over me. It's a long time since I had an admirer visit me in my dressing-room. Quite like old times, *hein?*"

"You should have lain down for at least another hour," he protested.

"I'm tired of lying down and staring up at a ceiling that badly needs whitewashing, and is crawling with spiders, ants and God knows what vermin. I'm tired of gargling and resting my throat as though it is some rare medical specimen in a bottle. All the time my mind is singing—yes, my mind—those beautiful melodies which I once trilled from my throat. While I lay on my back in that room I was singing the rôle of *Isolde* from 'Tristan'—a glorious swan song."

"You'll sing it again, some day, Marquise," said Paul.

"Maybe, but I want this new friend of mine to hear my voice at its best. Don't be alarmed," she smiled, as Rawlings rose, showing his concern. "It is only a gramophone record. Paul, put on that duet from 'La Bohème.'"

"It will only distress you, Marquise."

"Do as you're told." She stamped a fat, carpet-slippered foot on the floor. "Is it not your business—you, my manager?"

Humiliated, he went to the phonograph in the corner of the room. He lifted it to the table and selected a record. The needle whirred and scratched in the well-worn grooves. There was the orchestral introduction. Then came the sweet and pure voice of *Mimi* lifted in that passionate love duet in the garret which ends the first act of "La Bohème." The voice was that of the Marquise.

RAWLINGS looked at the figure in the stage kimono. She was posturing, acting despite the shabby background. The podgy figure was living her triumphs again. But the tears coursed down her cheeks.

The record ended in a mechanical whirring.

"Another—another!" demanded the Marquise impetuously.

"It only causes you to suffer," said the manager.

"No matter. I wish to suffer. You cannot have had an excess of happiness without suffering an excess of unhappiness. I demand the Jewel Song from 'Faust.'"

The sallow-faced Paul shrugged his shoulders, rummaged among the records, and wound up the phonograph again. A few moments later the trilling song of *Marguerite* sounded in the sun-lusted room. Once again it was the voice of the Marquise. It was superb in its strength and complete mastery of the notes. The figure in the kimono swayed before him, a faint smile upon her fat features, an ecstasy of memories in her eyes. . . .

There came a heavy thumping on the door. An angry voice shouted in English:

"Stop that bloody row! I'm trying to get some sleep. Go and play your blasted gramophone out to sea!"

The Marquise gestured.

"Turn it off! It is enough. I think I will lie down again." She held out a hand to Rawlings, who impulsively bent and kissed it. "It has been most pleasant to make your acquaintance monsieur," she added. "And you have been most kind."

"It has been a great day for me, Marquise," he replied, gallantly.

She gave him a quick, mischievous glance.

"Do you know my real name, the name I concealed even before I became the Marquise de la Fossette?"

"Does it matter?"

"It may. I was born Mary Ellen Jackson, of Warrington, Lancashire. Warrington is the sort of birthplace most people would like to forget. But I don't. Amusing, isn't it?"

She began to laugh, loudly. The buttoned-up manager, protesting, followed her into the bedroom.

"Marquise! You will kill yourself. Please!"

Rawlings wandered forth from the room and reached the veranda facing the sea. The young crowd had disappeared. The veranda was deserted. Only a table filled with empty glasses remained. . . .

Three nights later, the sky over Port Said throbbed to the drone of Axis planes. It was the first serious attack. For some strange reason the enemy had hitherto ignored the harbors and basin that opened to this ditch of the Suez Canal crossing the desert. But this particular attack coincided with the arrival of a small convoy of ships escorted by a cruiser and two corvettes.

To the Port Observation Post, known colloquially as "P.O.P.," Commander Rawlings was paying one of his regular inspection visits. Lieutenant Harry Boyle was the officer on duty. Steel shutters sealed the room. A huge clock glowed like a full moon in the blue-shaded lights. The minute-hand moved remorselessly. The tick was loud in the hot silence. The stale atmosphere suggested a submarine in the depths.

A grooved chart of the docks and basins was stretched across one wall. Little square pieces of wood in black, blue and red were fitted into slots. They represented ships in the harbor. It was like a toy displayed to children in a kindergarten. At the moment, Commander Rawlings was regarding it with some anxiety.

Against another wall was a long table which held the black, shining box of radio equipment. A white-garbed sailor in shorts was seated there. With earphones strapped to his head, he slowly twisted the dials of the wave-lengths, tuning in. Suddenly he stiffened. His hand reached out for a pencil. He began to scribble.

AT another table sat Lieutenant Boyle. He had a telephone to his ear. His voice had the staccato sound of a distant Bofors:

"Yes, this is P.O.P., Port Said. Who are you?"

"Radio Location Number Five, Alexandria, speaking. Eight Junkers—repeat, eight Junkers—heading in your direction."

"Okay. Any bombs dropped on your deck?"

"Not a cinder."

"Any flak?"

"Our searchlights found two Jerries. Ack-ack opened up, but they were at eight thousand."

"What's your timing?"

"They passed over here at twenty-three hours precisely. Estimated time of arrival with you should be twenty-three hours fifteen."

"Thanks for the tip. We'll phone you when night fighters can take off."

"Good luck, and good hunting."

Alexandria rang off. Boyle immediately plugged in to one of the sockets in the switchboard before him.

"Is that Radio Location Number One?"

"Yes sir."

"Got them yet?"

"Not yet, sir. We're dialing."

He looked at the clock. It was four minutes past eleven.

"You should be tuning in to them any minute. Phone me immediately."

"Yes sir."

Another plug pushed into the socket.

"Radio Location Number Two?"

"Yes sir."

"Anything to report?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Phone me as soon as you've got their direction."

"Yes sir."

Boyle turned to Commander Rawlings.

"Alex thinks we're the objective, sir. Shall we loose off Lizzie?"

"I'll give the signal," nodded Rawlings.

With a quick gesture of his fingers he flicked a switch over. The wailing of sirens began to sound throughout Port Said and Port Fuad on the other side of the Canal.

The men in that room could visualize the scene. In the darkened streets there would be a scurry as of rats in a

ship's hold. Arabs huddled against walls and trying to sleep, would grope helplessly like blind men. Shopkeepers, living above their stores of junk from Nagasaki and Birmingham, would rush downstairs to see that the shutters were bolted across the windowpanes.

But it would be in the dance-halls of Port Said where the queerest dramas would be enacted. The sound of the siren would infiltrate like a pungent odor. The band players, even though bent over their instruments, would not fail to hear it. They would lift their heads; their hands would falter in the playing. Dancers, many clinging closely together, would slow down their gyrations like a fading cinema showing when the electric current is failing. Couples would stop and stare at each other. The floor-shows in the cabarets would cease abruptly, and the dancers droop like clockwork figures needing to be rewound. The whole scene would become as static as a game of charades.

"I hope Jeanne is okay," thought Harry Boyle, as he plugged in on his switchboard. "This is just about the time of her final dance number at the Eastern Exchange."

"Message just received from *Destroyer H.55,* thirty-five miles off the Delta," said the white-garbed sailor at the radio as he handed a signal to Commander Rawlings. "Shall I acknowledge, sir?"

"Please do," said Rawlings.

He fumbled with his spectacles to read the signal. It was brief:

Eight Junkers sighted over Delta proceeding southeast direction Port Said stop Warning all ships in harbor stop Destroyer course altered direction Port Said and should arrive within an hour end message Signed Lieutenant Commander Watkins.

"Cruiser *Lancashire* asking if she can break searchlight, sir?" announced the radio operator.

"Tell her, no," snapped back Rawlings. "Signal for flak will be a red rocket fired from this station. Okay?"

"Okay, sir," nodded the operator, tapping at his key.

SEVEN minutes past eleven, ticked the dial of the clock. The siren had dribbled into silence. "Another five minutes, and they'll be here," decided Rawlings. His gaze was still on the grooved chart. That blasted ammunition ship was a danger. If it should be hit, the whole waterfront would be shattered. There was the oil tanker, too. Thank the Lord he had insisted on both ships being put into different basins, a couple of miles apart.

"Hello . . . Hello! Who are you?" Boyle's voice was querulous. "Cairo!

Boyle stepped forward. "They got Sparks, sir," he said.

Never had the Marquise sung better. Even Moissac looked up as at a miracle.

I don't want you. No. They may be here any moment. Get off the line. I'll ring you back when the fun begins."

He snapped in another plug.

"Yes, this is P.O.P. speaking. You got 'em? About time, too!" Over his shoulder he muttered: "Radio Location Two giving us their directional finding, sir."

"I'll take it," said Rawlings, drawing a pad forward. "Flick it out Sparks to all ships in harbor."

"Yes sir."

"Go ahead, Boyle!"

"Go ahead, Location Two! Twenty miles west northwest . . . altitude six thousand . . . speed two hundred m.p.m. . . . Okay, repeat!"

He dropped his voice as though in a liturgy for the repeat. The radio operator's wrist was tense and white, while the tapping of the Morse sounded like the rattle of dice in a box

Eleven minutes past eleven.

"I'm going out on the bridge, Boyle," said Rawlings quietly. "Hang on to the phone."

"Yes sir," replied Boyle, and thought: "Hell, why can't I watch the fireworks?"

"When the shooting starts, you can douse lights and raise the shutters," came back the voice of Rawlings as though he had heard that unexpressed thought.

"Thank you, sir . . . Hello, R.A.F. H.Q. This is P.O.P. speaking. Any fighters going up? Two! Hell, is that all we can spare? Okay, over to you. . . . Hullo—hullo! Get me Cairo Yes, G.H.Q. Hurry!"

ON the balcony outside the office, perched a hundred feet above the waterfront, Commander Rawlings was gazing out into a darkness that was as effective as though he had been hooded with a sack. Below him could be heard the quiet gurgle of the water. A few stars were reflected in the inky pools that were enclosed by the quays.

"Almost as though the barcarolle in 'The Tales of Hoffman' was about to be sung," he thought. He hummed the slow, dreamy melody to himself. "I wonder if she ever appeared in that opera? She didn't say. But to begin as Mary Ellen Jackson of Warrington and become the Marquise de la Fossette! Not bad."

He stretched out a hand for the rocket gun. His finger closed about the trigger. He could hear the planes now. Bombers—no mistaking that heavy drone. Like a hundred bass fiddles in the slow prelude to a Hungarian Rhapsody by Liszt. In a few moments the whole orchestra would be blasting to hell.

"Radio Location One. . . . Okay, I am transmitting your directional. The voice of Boyle could be heard, calm and unemotional. Good fellow, Boyle. A fool with the girls, but a first-class man on duty. "I'll repeat that. . . . Down to four thousand. . . . Speed one hundred and twenty m.p.h. Three miles due west. . . . No, I can't hear the blasted machines. I'm in a sardine tin. Okay."

They were overhead now. Would they pass over? Unlikely, unless they were going for Ismailia or Kantara. Those Jerry pilots knew their way about. Almost certainly the ditch was showing.

A flare suddenly burst in the night sky. Then another. A third. It was as though arc lamps were dropping from heaven. So bright was the sky, it might have been day ripping the black covering envelope. He could see the parachutes carrying the flares, swaying gently like the skirts of ballet girls descending to a Chopin nocturne.

Then came that loud whistle like a train entering a tunnel. The first bomb. No need for further concealment. Port Said was the objective. He jerked the trigger of the gun. A sudden explosion, and a red rocket was searing the sky.

The next moment it seemed that the bowels of the earth had erupted, and the fires deep down were leaping to the sky. Simultaneously a dozen

searchlights split the sky, knifing the heights ruthlessly. One beam began to waggle and waver in signal. Immediately all converged in one cone. Three Junkers, like ghost butterflies, had been caught in the light.

THEN the guns exploded into action. The crouching crews had been waiting in the darkness. There was that rapid slamming of a thousand and one doors, one after another, as the Bofors went into action. Then came the shattering boom of the cruiser's guns. More explosions. Every ship in the harbor was loosing metal at those ghost butterflies, diving and twisting to escape the blinding rays. Two succeeded. One was held, pinned like a specimen to the board of the sky.

"Pure Tchaikovsky," decided Rawlings. "Guns and all. But who will orchestrate this '1942 Overture?' It will need tommy-guns among the fiddles and detonators among the drums."

He chuckled at the thought.

"Your tin hat, sir."

Boyle was at his side.

"Thanks, Boyle. I dare say I shall need it. A lot of stuff going up that has to come down."

"Yes sir."

A stick of bombs came swishing and whistling down. There were two explosions from the dark huddle of buildings that was Port Said. Flames and billowing smoke.

"Looks like a hit on the Arab town," said Rawlings.

"I think you're right, sir. A great pity."

The parachute flares were now dribbling fire toward the sea. In a few moments they would be extinguished. The groping fingers of the searchlights were probing the sky. Suddenly the antiaircraft guns in Port Fuad flared into action.

"They've banked and turned. Come down another thousand feet. This time they're going for the docks."

Now, even the machine-guns were stuttering with fire. Flak in the shape of colored globes of fire, like glittering balls thrown by giant jugglers across the sky, were bursting about the metal insects swooping down. The cruiser's guns belched again. One of the planes halted. A wing crumpled. A searchlight held it remorselessly. The watchers could see it, twisting and tumbling. A tongue of flame flickered. The machine became a falling torch, a meteor of incandescence, and then plunged with a souse of spray into the sea.

"That's finished one of 'em!" shouted Boyle ecstatically.

But a hand caught his neck and flung him to the floor of the balcony. Rawlings had acted swiftly. He saw the bomb falling in the searchlight like a glycerine tear on a film star's close-up. It burst within fifty yards of them. The whole building seemed to be caught like an empty matchbox in a crushing hand. A plank, a girder, or a body, soared over the heads of the two prone men. Rawlings felt a searing pain in his arm; Boyle discovered that a piece of timber had pinned his legs.

"You all right, sir?" he gasped.

"More or less, Boyle. What about yourself?"

"Something holding my legs down, sir."

"Wait a moment. I've a flashlamp."

Rawlings flicked the light downward. He saw the beam which had pinned Boyle to the ground. He pushed the flashlamp into Boyle's hand, and tugged with his one arm at the beam. After some exertion, Boyle was freed. Rawlings helped him to his feet, where he swayed a little, uncertainly.

"Quick work on your part, sir, when the bomb was falling. Many thanks."

Rawlings felt the trickle of blood beginning down his arm.

"Anything left of the office?" he asked.

Somewhere a telephone was ringing. It shrilled into the darkness. The searchlights were posing Euclidean patterns in the sky. From ninety degrees they had fallen to forty-five. One beam had dropped to thirty degrees.

"I think they're off, sir."

"Maybe, but others will follow up."

"Hope not."

"Better answer that telephone, Boyle; I think someone is calling us."

Boyle took the flashlamp and gingerly stepped forward. The thin beam revealed the whole office in ruins. A prone figure was bowed over the radio set. The white clothes were heavily stained by dark patches. Boyle withdrew a sticky hand.

"They got Sparks, sir."

"Blast 'em. He was one of the best. A good lad, and—"

Emotion choked Rawling's voice.

Boyle turned away and clutched at the telephone which still stood, miraculously, clamped to the splintered wall. It was shrilling impatiently.

"Yes. . . . Who? . . . Oh, Cairo. Yes, attack over. Extent of damage unknown as yet. Yes, I'm afraid some killed."

The slumped body of the dead radio operator slowly began to fall toward him. He put out his sticky hand.

Boyle and Rawlings were helping each other along a dark street littered with shrapnel and pieces of shell, when the siren sounded the warning of a second attack. Rawlings had been wounded in the arm. A splinter had torn the flesh badly. A first-aid station had dressed the wound, and examined the bruised legs of Boyle. They had both been ordered back to the hotel while a relief party took over in the ruins of the Port Observation Office.

"D'you think you can make the hotel, sir?"

"I can manage it, Boyle. What about yourself?"

"I'm feeling okay, sir."

But even as they reached the door of the Kursaal Palace Hotel, the second wave of planes was droning overhead. Boyle had to hammer on the closed door with the torch while Rawlings kept a thumb on the electric bell, before the scared face of the head-waiter showed itself.

They staggered into the hotel as the noisy symphony of guns began to tear the night again. Bofors were slamming doors, flak was flung about theatrically and, despite the heavily curtained windows, the bright daylight of parachute flares filtered through the folds.

"I think this calls for a whisky and soda, Boyle," said Rawlings.

"Several, sir, surely?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Jerry is making a night of it, anyway, so why shouldn't we?" He turned to the waiter. "Where is everybody?"

The head-waiter had the scared and fragile look of the cane furniture in the entrance hall amidst which he stood.

"Everybody is in the back lounge, sir," he quavered.

"What, in that dismal morgue?"

"It has the advantage of having no windows, sir. It is the safest place. The bar is open there, sir. It's doing good business."

"I'll bet it is," grunted Boyle.

The head-waiter was fascinated by the bandaged arm of the Commander which, bound in rough splints, gave Rawlings the appearance of a strolling fiddler in the act of playing his violin.

"You've been wounded, sir?"

"No, I'm just looking interesting," said the Commander. "Lead us to the bar."

BUT the head-waiter stood transfixed, his head cocked sideways in an intent expression of listening. The first bomb of the new attack was falling. It could be heard whistling downward. Instinctively the waiter tried to sink his head between his hunched shoulders. There was a distant crash. Cautiously, he raised his head.

"We'd better begin drinking before the bar is hit," decided Boyle, practically.

"I agree with you," said the Commander, and with his outstretched

fiddler's arm he pushed past the head-waiter.

They entered the large, tomblike room at the back of the hotel. It presented a strange shambles of humanity. The greatly varied guests were occupying chairs, sitting on cushions or pillows strewn about the floor, leaning up against the walls, or just padding to and fro like caged beasts in a zoo. They were garbed in extraordinary fashion. A huge, grizzled Pole, hair *en brosse*, stalked about in bare, hairy legs which emerged from his too short nightshirt. His straggling beard gave him the appearance of an Old Testament prophet calling woe upon all sinners. Actually, he was relating an extremely dubious story to a prim English teacher who was wearing a man's coat over her nightdress and a pair of pince-nez on her sharp nose.

A SLIM, Levantine commercial traveler in striped pajamas browsed like a zebra over a long table which had been transformed into an impromptu bar. He was drinking glasses of brandy, neat. He talked with rapidity, in between his drinking, to a podgy little woman, all pink fluff and furs, who had tears streaming down her face wrecking the awful make-up.

"I tell you the dog is in the bedroom," the Levantine repeated to her. "It is chained to the bed."

"Oh, it is too cruel," sobbed the woman. "Not a biscuit for the darling to eat: not a bowl of water from which to drink. You must go upstairs, Eustasius, and attend to the darling."

"I'll see you both in hell, first," replied the Levantine, reaching out for the brandy bottle.

Boyle ordered whiskies and sodas. He noticed that the terrified barman gave himself a drink at each order. As the drinks were being handed over with trembling hands, another whistling descent of bombs could be heard. Boyle caught the drinks in time.

"Reminds me of that story of a London pub during the blitz," he said. "Have you heard it, sir?"

"I'm willing to hear anything tonight."

"The bombs were whistling down when the barman shouted to all the cronies there, 'Drink up, boys, the next one's on the house.' And it was."

The Commander chuckled and raised his glass. He observed that in a corner of the room all the Arab waiters in their *galabeahs* had gathered. They were muttering prayers and bowing in Mohammedan fashion:

"Allah il akbar. . . . Allah il akbar!"

His gaze traveled the medley of frightened faces of the hotel guests to where the Marquise de la Fossette was sitting. She was dressed in a fashion which could only be described as *folie de grandeur*. A long, white satin gown swept the floor. A shabby red jacket which had the appearance of having been wrenched from a plush chair, covered her shoulders. Round her fat neck, dangling over her breasts, and covering her plump fingers, were lumps of fake jewelry. They could deceive no one, and were obviously stage properties. And on her head, slightly askew, was a yellow wig with two heavy plaits like ropes that came over her shoulders. By her side, fully dressed in black suit and with the inevitable cravat, was her manager. He was watchful and attentive, as always.

"The Marquise looks as though she's waiting her entrance cue to sing the Jewel Song in 'Faust,'" murmured Rawlings.

"I had the impression that it was Marie Antoinette waiting her turn at the guillotine, with the executioner by her side," chuckled Boyle, cruelly. But he was not interested in the Marquise. He saw that the old lady was urging and pleading with the Levantine cabaret girl, Jeanne. Boyle still admired and wanted her. Thank goodness, she was safe. She was still in her cabaret costume, the brief skirt displaying her slim legs to fullest advantage. It would seem that she had run to the hotel at the first alarm sounded by the sirens.

Boyle was about to move toward the girl, when Rawlings said quietly:

"Another drink, Boyle."

It was almost a command.

"Yes sir. Thanks!"

While the drinks were being served, he observed the girl more closely. She was in a bad way. There was terror in her glittering eyes and in the pallid face on which the rouge stood out in patches. Her hands fluttered vainly about her skimpy skirt, her slightly disordered hair, or fingered her tremulous lips. With a jerk of her hand she emptied the drink at her side. Already she was tipsy, but fear kept her sober. The crash of a near-by bomb or the explosion of the cruiser's heavy guns, jerked her limbs like those of a marionette.

"Don't worry, my dear," the old Marquise said to her, soothingly. "It can't last very much longer."

"It will end in all of us being bombed to hell," sobbed Jeanne, in a frenzy.

"No, no. You must not think such things. And we all have to face death sooner or later, you know."

"That's what *you* say!" shrilled the girl. "It's okay for an old hag like you. You've had your life. But what about me? I'm young. I want all that life can give me. I want love, men, and money. You go back to your bloody knitting and leave me alone!"

The Marquise tightened her lips. But she realized the girl was hysterical. Mary Ellen Jackson was not so easily overcome. She stroked the girl's hair soothingly, and began whispering to her.

Another bomb came whistling down. The explosion shook the room. A bottle fell off the bar table and was smashed. The liquor began to run, but an Arab waiter went on his knees and began to lick the floor. Boyle was about to go to Jeanne, but Rawlings had stuck his fiddler's arm before him.

"Didn't you say we were going to make a night of it, Boyle?"

"I did, sir."

"Well, drink up. I'm calling."

The Marquise was urging in whispers:

"And show yourself a heroine, my dear. You and I are artistes. We have a duty to the public—*our* public. They expect us to perform, whatever happens. And now here is your great moment. This is your greatest audience. You will dance. You will show yourself a great artiste. They will forget their fear in watching you. And it will help you to forget."

"I can't. . . . I don't want to. Leave me alone," cried the girl.

"Everyone will be proud of you," went on the Marquise. "Women will be envious. I shall be envious of you." She nodded to her manager, who went sullenly to the piano in a corner of the room. He sat down and began to play. "There's your cue, my dear. Your own number at the cabaret. Paul knows it. Now, dance!"

Her urging, prompting, forced the girl to rise from the floor. Jeanne gazed round with her frightened eyes and, slightly tipsy, posed herself as though awaiting the revealing limelight. The crowd in the room fell back to give her floor space. The Levantine in loud striped pajamas began to applaud loudly. Others followed his example. The girl lifted her face toward the light.

"Good girl, that," said Rawlings. "She's got guts."

BOYLE was gazing at her with admiration. He had decided that before the night was finished, he would ask her to marry him. In the meantime he watched her as the possessive lover to be.

Beyond the walls of the windowless room, the crashing gunfire continued. But it faded into the background as Paul Moissac thumped out the jazz tune in sullen fashion at the piano. The girl began to dance. Her limbs jerked to the familiar tune. Her body swayed. But the whole af-

fair was a miserable pretence. There was no life in it. Terror still glittered in her eyes. She kicked a leg, and the skimpy frock fluttered. Then she broke down.

"I can't. . . . I can't," she sobbed.

"You can, my dear. You know you can. *Now!*"

THE Marquise, with her quiet voice, was as commanding as any stage manager.

The girl made a second effort. It was more pathetic than the first. There came a rapid burst of Bofors in the distance, followed by another whistling descent of bombs. And above the whistle came the girl's screaming. Jeanne stood there in the center of the room, screaming her terror in the face of that scared audience.

Rising from her chair, the Marquise took the girl in her arms and began to soothe her. Eventually, Jeanne was laid down, a sobbing helpless figure on a heap of cushions. The men and women in the room who had witnessed this stripping of pretence which revealed only naked terror, seemed themselves on the verge of hysteria. Their faces were white and strained.

The Marquise took command of the situation. She stood up in that absurd costume with its fake jewelry and wig with golden plaits, and called over to her manager who was still restlessly strumming at the piano.

"Paul, the Jewel Song," she said, quietly but distinctly.

"*Ma foi,* Marquise, you are mad!"

"You heard what I said."

"I refuse."

"No, Paul, you will not."

"But it will kill you."

"We may all be killed, at any moment. I would rather die singing than whispering or whimpering."

Reluctantly, Moissac bowed himself at the piano. The familiar music of Gounod began to sound in the room. Astonishing how clearly it rose above the gunfire, the stutter of machine-guns, and the whistle of bombs. Rawlings watched the podgy figure gather herself together, kneel to a heap of cushions, and become again the *Marguerite,* the beloved of Faust, decking herself with jewels.

The voice rose pure and clear. It climbed higher, and was triumphant in its glorious strength. The trills were mastered with an ease that would have held an audience spellbound and ecstatic at the Scala, the Metropolitan, or at Covent Garden. It held the strange audience in that room equally spellbound. They forgot the booming of the guns and the crash of collapsing buildings. They forgot the drone of the bombers above and the high whine of the fighters in pursuit. They heard only a magnificent voice ringing clearly and sweetly in a glorious song that was familiar to them all.

Never had the Marquise de la Fossette sung better. Even Moissac, at the piano, looked up as at a miracle happening before his eyes. As he thumped out the last notes and the Marquise bowed her head, humbly, the applause of all in that room broke out in a frenzy. They clapped, they cheered. The Levantine in pajamas whistled while the podgy woman at his side continued to shout in his ear: "Will you go upstairs and save my darling dog?" Only the Levantine dancer, Jeanne, her dark eyes still wide with fear, stared up from her heap of cushions and twisted her lips in mortification.

The Marquise turned and bent toward her.

"Come, my dear. Try again. I'm scared, too, you know."

"A trick! A dirty stage trick. Go to hell!" shouted the girl, and spat in the face of the singer.

The Marquise turned. There was spittle and tears on her cheeks. She walked toward the piano and whispered again to Moissac. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly, but strummed the keys. And then, turning again, Mary Ellen Jackson, in that absurd garb, stood before the scared crowd and began to sing:

Roll out the barrel,
We'll have a barrel of fun.
Roll out the barrel,
We'll get the blues on the run.

An absurd song for a prima donna. But it suited the desperate mood of the moment, as it had for many men and women who were enduring the horrors that this war rained down upon them all over the world. Soon, the whole audience joined in. They rollicked in the melody. The gunfire was but a muttering background now.

Rawlings was singing the song with gusto. He waved his empty glass to the rhythm. He noticed for the first time that Boyle had disappeared. Two couples had begun to dance to the song. The figure in striped pajamas had seized the burly Pole in the nightshirt and was attempting to whirl him about the room. Even the dark-faced Arabs were lolling red tongues over the tune.

Sing, boom, tararrel,
Bring out a song of good cheer,
Now's the time to roll the barrel,
For the gang's all here.

Then, suddenly, the song broke. Rawlings saw the singer give a convulsive jerk. Blood trickled from her mouth. She swayed. He made an effort to reach her. But Paul Moissac was before him. He had jumped up from the piano and caught her as she fell.

"Marquise. . . Marquise!" he babbled. "What have you done!"

The blood was streaming from her mouth. The wig with its yellow plaits was askew. The white satin gown was stained like the jacket on her shoulders. Her eyes, smiling through pain, gazed up at him.

"It's all over, Paul," she whispered. "Better this way—than the other."

"All over for me, too," he sobbed.

"No, Paul. You will play for other artistes, perhaps even a greater one."

"No, that can never be."

There was silence for a moment. Paul gazed distraught at the glazing eyes. His voice broke:

"Marquise . . . . Marquise!"

"Yes, Paul?"

"I . . . I always loved you."

"Yes, I knew." Her eyes closed as though with tired satisfaction, but her lips gave a final smile. "Thank you, Paul."

Her head sank back. At the same moment the startled audience in the windowless room heard the loud, shrill tones of the "all clear" sounding.

"All clear! . . . All clear!" they shouted to each other.

"All clear!" sighed the Marquise, and died.

STANDING by her, Commander Rawlings felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Boyle who had been out into the streets again and returned with the news.

"My God, she was magnificent, sir," was all that Boyle could find to say.

"My God, she was!" nodded Rawlings.

There was silence for a moment. Boyle regarded the Levantine girl, Jeanne, who was sullenly dabbing her face with a powder-puff. She gave a flirtatious glance over her shoulder at him. He turned his back and ignored her.

"What's the score, Boyle?" asked Rawlings, looking up.

"Er . . . oh, yes, sir. I came back to tell you. Three Junkers down; two over Port Said and a third on the way back near Alex. Good hunting, eh?"

"Any ships hit?"

"Not one, sir."

Rawlings nodded his satisfaction. He strolled away with his outstretched arm in splints. Without another look at the girl, Boyle followed.

Paul Moissac remained weeping over the body of the Marquise.

"One Night in Cairo," another of William Makin's characteristic and authentic dramas of North Africa, will appear in an early issue.

Bazooka Business

A photographic memory plus some cowboy skill pulled them out of a bad hole.

by ALBERT B. GERBER

IT was funny lying there on the sharp slope down from the river-bank to the river. I had lots of time to think; in fact, that's about all I could do. Hops (Jerome K. Hopkinson, Esq., once upon a time) was alongside of me, and fifty yards ahead of us was a Jap sniper up a tree with a submachine-gun ready and waiting.

I thought about the way we got into this position. It was during the push up on Vella Lavella Island—some name for that ugly morass of jungle! We had cleared most of the island and there was just a rearguard Jap outfit holding out, and a few snipers left to annoy us. Hops and I were in a light maintenance company attached to an infantry division, and we'd been sent to pick up some small arms to bring back for repair.

We had the jeep loaded with the stuff, and were coming back along the river-bank, when this Jap sniper got his sights on us, and gave us a few rounds. We jumped out and hid behind the river-bank. Ever so often, we tested the Jap by pushing a helmet over the bank in front of us, and sure enough we got a resounding *ping* for our pains. Of course, we had our carbines, but there was no way to get a sight on the Jap without exposing ourselves, for he was high up in the tree.

I lay there thinking about how I'd left the ranch and hoped for the cavalry, and ended up in Ordnance—a small-arms repairman. This sort of led me to think of Hops, who had been a lawyer and had been classified into Ordnance. He sure was a queer duck for an Ordnance outfit.

I still have to laugh when I think of Hops in basic training, back in Aberdeen. He was the most helpless guy from a mechanical standpoint that you could ever imagine. At the same time he had a wonderful brain and memory. When we took rifle preliminary instruction indoors at the blackboard, he could tell you exactly how to calculate windage and elevation on the sights. He always knew the right answers. He wasn't forward and annoying about it, but if the officer called on him, he gave it back straight. When we began to kid him about it, he became reticent at lectures, and never volunteered an answer. But when no one knew the answer, some Joe would yell, "Ask Hopkinson," or a guy would hold up Hop's hand, and he'd be forced to answer. They never stumped him: he knew the answers, all right.

But it sure was different when we got out to do the stuff. I was Hop's coach on the rifle range, and the poor guy could never get into a sling right, he needed help to get the sight-cover off, and whenever he adjusted windage or elevation screws, he always seemed to turn them the wrong way.

Hops always attributed his phenomenal memory to his legal training. He told us how he used to have to read several hundred pages of law cases every night, and remember enough of it to discuss it intelligently the next day, and use it for exams months later. He pointed out that after his training the slim field manuals we have in the Army were just play.

That's the way he explained one of the funniest things that ever happened at our lectures. It was at a lecture on wire entanglements, and the officer lecturing happened by accident to pick on Hops when he said: "Describe the barbed wire we use."

Hops got up a bit self-consciously and recited, "The barbed wire we use consists of a twisted, double strand of Number 12 gauge wire with four-point barbs spaced four inches apart. It comes in reels of four hundred and twenty yards weighing about one hundred pounds per reel."

The theater was quiet, and the officer, who had been following the answer in his notes, thought he'd have his little joke. He said:

"Haven't you forgotten something?"

Hops hesitated, then said:

"Oh, yes, the weight of the reel is five pounds, making a total weight per reel of one hundred and five pounds."

Maybe it doesn't sound funny now, but when you get a couple of hundred guys together, to whom barbed wire is just barbed wire, and no more, an explanation like that is dynamite.

With the type of mind that Hops had, he scored high in the mechanical aptitude test at the Reception Center, and that landed him in Ordnance. At Aberdeen they had first tried him in small arms—repairing rifles, automatics, machine-guns, etc. I was in that school at the time Hops started. He was fine on theory and could get the right answers on a written examination, but when it came actually to tearing a rifle down and putting it back together again, he always had enough pieces left to make another rifle. And the Army is funny about their weapons—an M-1903 rifle is supposed to have one hundred and eight parts and the Army insists on one hundred and eight parts being there every time the piece is released. The Army wants no original thinking by its repairmen.

Well, two weeks later, at the request of the sergeant-instructor at the small-arms school, Hops was transferred to Clerks' Training, where he studied to be a supply clerk. This was right up his alley, and he became the prize graduate of the school. If the school had had its way, Hops would have become an instructor; but Hops had other ideas, and so he was shipped out.

As a pure matter of chance, Hops and I landed in the same outfit in Australia. I was in the small-arms section, and Hops was a supply clerk. However, when you get out into the field, that nicety of division of labor that the Army sets up on papers called T O's (tables of organization) doesn't work so well. I found that I was at times a truck-driver, a cook, an artillery rigger, and a general all-around man. Hops sort of became my assistant. There wasn't much clerking to do, and Hops was a willing guy, albeit somewhat of a butterfingers. But I had patience, and since I was pretty good with my hands, and Hops remembered what I should do with them, we made a pretty good team. So, when they sent me out to pick up a load of stuff at a collecting point, Hops naturally went along with me.

AT the moment, I didn't feel so kindly disposed toward the guy. The tension of all this waiting was beginning to get me. We had to wait until darkness and then try to escape, and it was only 14:00 now; we had six or seven hours to wait. We couldn't move much, but, thank God, we could smoke, and I had a full pack with me.

Slowly the hours passed, while the red ball of the sun sank beyond the trees at our backs. We talked very little—mostly me, making wisecracks. I had been thinking of Hops and his

queer penchant for remembering bits of information out of technical manuals, and I said:

"How about coming up with TM-27-963 or something on 'How to get out of a hole when you're covered by a sniper'?"

At first, Hops didn't get me. "What the deuce are you talking about?" he said.

I explained, with some sarcasm:

"You're a walking library of Army lore. Let's see you pull one out of the books to handle this."

Hops is a very even-tempered guy, and even that didn't rile him. He said thoughtfully, "You know, maybe you've got something there. There ought to be a method of solving this. Men have got out of worse scrapes than this, by using their heads."

I answered, "Sure, all you have to do is remember the right page, and presto, we're out."

Hops said, "No. Wait a minute. You saw that bazooka we picked up, and you said it was queer that it was loaded with a rocket." I nodded. "Well, we're only ten feet or so from the jeep, and we can see the bazooka on top of the pile. You were a cowboy; if we make a lasso out of strips of clothing, belts, and stuff, can you get the bazooka down here?"

I said, "Yeah, I *might*, but what good is a bazooka? That Jap's not in a tank or behind a pill-box."

Hops hesitated, and then said, "I'll tell you later. Let's get it."

We made a loop out of our G.I. belts tied together with shoelaces and extended with strips of fatigue uniform. I remembered that I had misgivings about it, because I didn't think our supply sergeant was going to like it—at the same time I wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for my chance to see that sergeant's sour puss ever again. Finally, we had something I thought would do it. Fortunately, one end of the bazooka protruded out and had clearance, so it was my idea to weight the makeshift lariat with a stone, and hope that when I tossed it over the pipe end, it would wind itself around a few times.

It worked, and slowly and cautiously I pulled the bazooka toward us. The Jap took notice, and fired a few rounds, but they spattered away harmlessly. I examined the bazooka. Luckily there was nothing much wrong with it. The electrical contact with the dry-cell batteries had come off, but Hops had a metal paper clip that served for temporary repairs.

When that was done, I said: "Now what, Houdini?"

"We aim the bazooka at the base of the tree in which the Jap is hidden," Hops said. "We let 'er go, and see what happens."

I didn't see what could happen, but it gave us something to kill time with, so we dug a small ditch in which to place the bazooka, lined up the tree in the sights—with me on the sights, of course—and I slowly squeezed the trigger. There was a terrific explosion and the rocket hit the tree squarely in the middle. The tree went over like a broken matchstick. We waited a while, and then when we got no shots at a raised helmet or anything, I slowly crept over the bank. I had my carbine, and we were now on even terms with the Jap, since he was on the ground, so I felt a lot better.

A few minutes later, I felt entirely better, when I found the Jap with a broken neck—still clutching his light submachine-gun. I called for Hops, who was covering me, and he came up out of hiding.

My first question was:

"How did you know that would happen?"

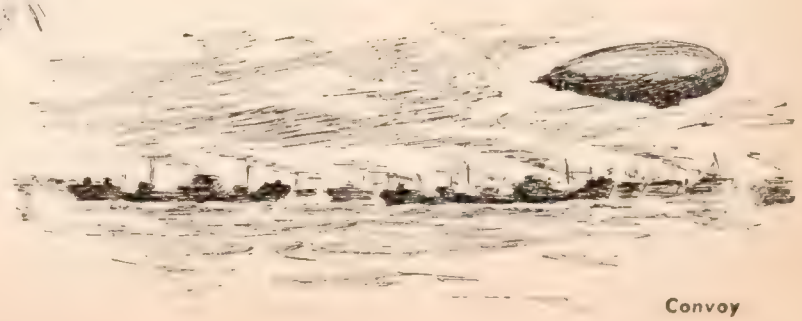
Hops smiled.

"There's a training manual that gives the exact effects and penetrations of this rocket—and I just happened to remember it."

From a Sailor's Sketchbook *by* CARL KIDWELL

K-Gun

Oil Slick



Convoy

ORDEAL in the

THERE was some danger, of course. Lieutenant Latham recognized that. Summer heat in the desert was nothing to trifle with. But if you were alert to the hazard and watched yourself, you would come through all right. What he feared more than heat and thirst was a collapse of discipline among his men.

"After all, sir, this is only maneuvers!" Sergeant Garrity reminded him.

Garrity was getting on Latham's nerves.

"Our orders are definite," he said. "We are to observe strict radio silence."

"The Lieutenant realizes that we're almost out of water?"

Latham knew only too well that the last water-can was almost empty, that already his eight men were suffering acutely in heat that dehydrated a man almost faster than he could absorb water, even if he had plenty of it. Latham checked his irritation, for he felt his responsibility to his men very keenly; and in spite of his youth, he had enough insight to know that in time of most stress a man in authority must remain most calm. His own firm quiet confidence must now stiffen discipline against panic.

He said, "Something unforeseen usually happens in combat. We have to learn to meet it."

"But this isn't combat, sir!"

"For all intents and purposes, it is."

There was no sense to maneuvers unless you played mock war as if it were the real thing. Sergeant Garrity should know that. "And, damn it," Latham thought, "it isn't as if I'm going to kill off my men unnecessarily!" They'd be plenty miserable for a while, sweating out this chore; but if he could hold them together in a disciplined body, obeying instructions, they should come through.

Sergeant Garrity jerked a thumb toward the south.

In his sharp voice was an edge of accusation as he said, "There's something else that's unexpected, sir. A *santa ana* blowing up out of Mexico."

He turned away, his deeply sunburned face rebellious, his withdrawal saying eloquently: "Okay, then, whatever happens will be your fault." Garrity wasn't really shifting all responsibility, however, Latham knew. Garrity had too much drive to do that. He was just very much annoyed, and worried. To Garrity, the solution of their problem was so simple—all they had to do was radio back to Headquarters to send them water.

Yet Garrity himself would never do that if this were actual combat.

"But how can I be sure of that? How can any of us be sure, if we don't stand this test now? That's what maneuvers are for!" thought Lieutenant Latham. He lifted binoculars and studied the pass that cut a V in the long mountain rampart ahead of them. It was the job of this detail to watch that pass.

They had left their base in Desert Training Center in two armored half-tracks. Sergeant Garrity's vehicle had broken a tread in crossing a boulder wash. Latham had ordered Garrity's car abandoned, and proceeded with both crews in his own car. All night they had driven eastward toward the Pelegro Range; at daybreak, continuing on to their designated post, they traveled up a great alluvial fan in the narrow bottom of a cut-bank gouged out of the slope by a cloudburst draining off the sun-blasted range ahead.

It was low-gear work in heat that drove the thermometer up to 124°. The half-track had boiled continuously. Water seemed to turn into steam as fast as Latham's men poured it into the radiator, and when they reached their post, the water-cans were almost empty. But they *had* reached their destination. And Latham immediately had the half-track, down in the steep-walled gully, roofed over by their camouflage net; and he set up watchers to keep a vigilant eye on that pass in the range ahead.

Through that pass the Blue Army might send a force of tanks in a swift surprise move to flank the Red Army.

LATHAM'S Red Army superiors hoped that's what the Blue high command would attempt, for the Red tacticians had a trap ready to spring if this maneuver was attempted.

The trap wouldn't work if the "enemy" knew that this pass was watched. That was why Lieutenant Latham had been ordered not to use his radio until the "enemy's" tanks were actually streaming through the pass: for Blue radios might pick up his broadcast and Blue tacticians realize that the pass was watched. Latham's superiors were not even sending a scouting plane over the area, in their effort to make the Blue brains believe that this pass was unknown and unguarded.

Lieutenant Latham knew how great was the responsibility on his detail. For the "trap" might boomerang. If the "enemy" tanks did come, and he did not send a warning to his superiors, the Blues might push an overwhelming force through this route before the Red Army was aware of what was happening.

"Today," Latham reflected, "this is just maneuvers. But day after tomorrow this might be the real thing!"

Uneasily he looked southward, and his pulse skipped a beat in consternation as he saw how rapidly that *santa ana* was advancing. The storm-cloud blanked out the horizon as it advanced, black and ominous. An ordinary storm would have been welcome,

DESERT

Three men died: two because they were weak; one although he was strong.

by George Armin Shaftel

but this would be a sandblasting hot inferno of a dust-gale. It would relieve neither thirst nor heat; instead, it would aggravate the misery of both, and intensify the mental strain.

"Sergeant," he ordered Garrity, "give the men a mouthful of water."

Garrity obeyed. Done, he brought the water-can to Latham and up-ended it to show that it was empty.

Garrity said: "Sir, since you do not wish to use the radio, I suggest that you send a runner back to the base with a request for a truck to bring us water."

"I don't believe a man could make it, in this heat. I wouldn't order it."

"I'm requesting permission to go, sir," said Garrity.

It was spoken truculently, but Lieutenant Latham did not let it anger him. In civil life, Bob Latham was a teacher. A bookish man with a deep strain of idealism, and a lively sense of his own inadequacies, he admired Neil Garrity's self-confidence and his drive. A big, muscular redhead, the Sergeant had a quick smile and a glib, humorous tongue that made him an efficient top-kick, liked and obeyed by the men under him. There was never a hint of uncertainty about him. He was quick to make a decision, and quick to act on it; and he had an inner stamina of self-assurance to match the enduring brawn of his heavy muscles.

"Sergeant, we can tough it out here for several days, even without water, if we keep our men absolutely quiet and under cover. By that time something—"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I've got to differ with you. Mike Ryan is damn' near in collapse right now. Let me go after water, sir!"

"All right. But wait till this dust-storm is over."

"Every hour I delay makes our chances that much less!"

"I said, wait until this storm is over," Latham repeated.

Their glances locked. Then Sergeant Garrity said formally: "Yes sir."

"If you got lost in this dust-blow you wouldn't get through at all."

But the Sergeant turned away as if he didn't hear. Latham flushed.

The first gusts of wind were kicking up a vast surf of dust across the slanting plain. Already the oncoming storm was halfway across the sky, and the livid white glare of the sun had changed to smoldering copper. "The dust will blot out the sky," Latham realized. "We wont be able to see a dozen yards away. If the Blue Army tank men have the guts to bust through that pass while the *santa ana* is still blowing, we'll never see 'em until they're on top of us—"

He caught a sharp breath of concern. Deliberately, then, he forced himself to relax, to let the taut lines ease from his face. Deliberately he sauntered over to his men stretched out in misery under the feeble shade of the camouflage net over the half-track, and he kept his voice casual and mild as he spoke.

"Just a dust-blow. It won't last long. Might be a good idea to cover your faces, just to keep sand out of your eyes."

Shorty McCoy grinned. Steve Lefkowitz looked scared.

"I've seen these dust-blows," Pete Nagle said. "They'll scour the paint off a car."

"Hell, they'll scour the tattoo right off your arm," Lew S'Renco muttered.

"Maybe a breeze'll cool us a bit," Slim Sikora said.

"A breeze! Huh, you'll think you're in the smokestack of a battlewagon."

"Take it easy, men," Lieutenant Latham said, and walked back to his post at the edge of the cut-bank. Somehow, it was always hard for him to think of these youngsters as actually soldiers.

And then the storm hit—a dark cloud of whooping dust rolling over the desert, blacking out the sun and hiding the far-flung length of Pelegro Range itself from view. A gale of sand lashed through the camouflage net as if it were as insubstantial as a drab rainbow. It almost took Latham off his feet. Sand drove into the men's faces, whipping into eyes and nostrils until they flattened themselves against the ground and covered their heads.

Latham slipped his gas mask over his face, and stayed on his feet, watching. Anxiously he studied his men.

THEY were taking a beating. Heat and thirst and desolation made the Desert Training Center a tough place: but it was said that after training here, no matter where troops went to fight, afterward, it would be a relief. . . . The wind brought no relief from the heat, and its swirling dust intensified the men's misery. Their lips were swollen and cracked and their throats burned and their tongues felt like something horrible in their mouths and a sick red haze came before their eyes.

Latham knew the punishment they were taking. "But we've *got* to tough it out," he told himself.

There was just one thing more important than the welfare of his men: that was doing the job assigned them by a higher command, which had to figure in dealing with a complex of forces, each of which had to do its assigned part if a victory were to be won. If his detail failed, failure would ripple back all along the line. You had to realize that; you had to know that you were a cog in a vast machine—tiny, yes, but vital to the working of that machine. And if that machine did not work in practice, what assurance was there that it would work when actual strain came upon it? . . .

Not until late afternoon did the dust-storm abate.

The low sun streamed like a cosmic flame-thrower through an atmosphere still aswirl with gusts of sand, but the force of the *santa ana* was spent. Sergeant Garrity approached Latham.

"Lieutenant, I'm going to start back to the base now."

Garrity said it truculently, as if ready to argue.

Latham nodded, but said calmly: "You can go, but wait until it's dark before you start, so that you won't be spotted by a recon' plane or enemy scouts on the ridge."

"But, sir, there aint no recon' plane aloft and no scouts—"

"We're acting as if there might be."

The men had been listening, and Slim Sikora blurted out: "Sir, I'm going with the Sergeant!"

Steve Lefkowitz said: "Me too!"

"No!" Lieutenant Latham spoke sharply. "Sergeant Garrity will go alone."

Joe Ross demanded: "Why don't we all pull out while we can still walk?"

"No," Latham repeated.

"How long do you intend to keep the outfit here, sir?"

"Until we are recalled."

"We'll be dead before that!"

"You'll be dead if you try to get back to the base afoot." Latham said sternly.

Sergeant Garrity blurted: "You're acting as if men's lives don't mean a damn to you!"

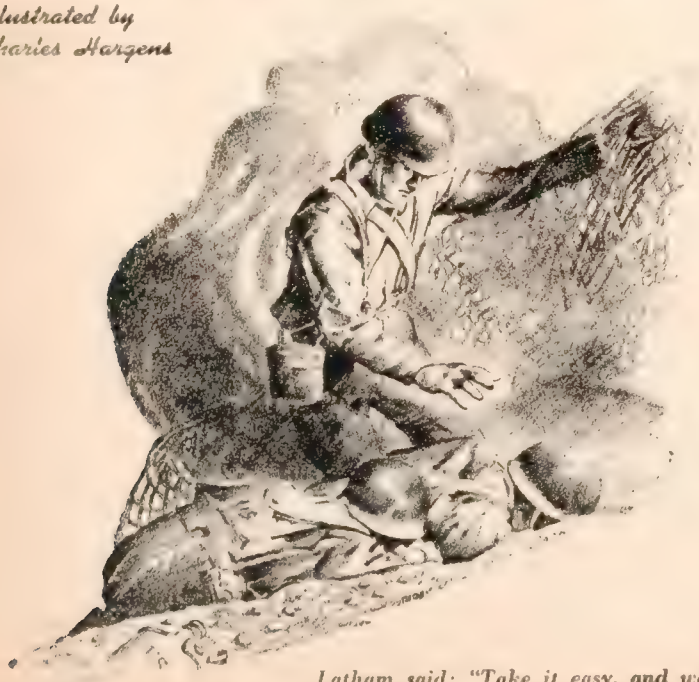
Lieutenant Latham's drawn face tightened; later, he would have to give the Sergeant a dressing-down for this kind of talk.

Latham said: "That's enough, men. Sergeant Garrity will leave as soon as it's dark, and he'll go alone. The rest of you will lie down to save your strength. Take it easy, and we'll tough this out all right."

He was obeyed, though for a moment he felt panicky rebelliousness in his men, so intense that he thought they were going to push right past him and desert the camp. But they turned back to their places under the camouflage net.

The air grew clearer as the sun set. Latham studied the ground around

Illustrated by Charles Hargens



Latham said: "Take it easy, and we'll tough this out all right."

Latham grabbed the transmitter. Ross and McCoy stared at him as if they could not believe their senses.

camp. The ripe berries of prickly pear would afford some relief to men tortured by thirst. But there was no prickly pear in sight at all. He did locate a single *viznaga* cactus, almost half a mile away; that might help a bit, though not much. He watched the sky for birds flying toward the chocolate-colored Pelegro Range, for in the evening desert doves usually winged to the little seeps in mountain gullies where they drank; but he saw no birds at all.

As the sun edged below the western peakline, Sergeant Garrity stood up and approached him.

"I'm going now, sir!"

"Okay, Sergeant. Get as far as you can tonight, but hole up at daybreak and save yourself to continue when it's dark again."

"I'll keep going until I find water, sir!"

He saluted, and strode off. The men's bloodshot eyes watched as he stalked down between the sheer walls of the gully.

A little later, when dusk had faded into night, Latham climbed out of the cut-bank and walked up the long slant of the alluvial fan to that single *viznaga* cactus he had sighted. He finally found it in the dim starlight. With the bayonet he had brought along, he hacked the top off of it and sliced out chunks of the white rubbery pulp. When you squeezed a bit of it in your hands, your fingers felt moist. The stuff wouldn't do much to alleviate the thirst of eight men, but it might give them a little lift of morale. Carrying it, he returned to the camp.

It seemed strangely quiet under the camouflage net.

He thumbed his flashlight on, and stood amazed. His men were gone—all but Mike Ryan, who evidently was too sick to go with the others. Ryan lay on his stomach, breathing stertorously and moaning.

Latham delayed just long enough to press some whitish liquid from the cactus pulp into Ryan's mouth, then started down the gully. His men had stampeded after Garrity, and unless he could bring them back, some of them would be dead tomorrow. Not one of them had Garrity's will and stamina.

He felt feverish as he ran, and anger stirred in him. The damned fools! By this break they were using up those last reserves of strength and self-control he had been counting on to tide them over until the detail was recalled.

HE ran a full mile before he saw the beam of a flashlight turned on at intervals ahead of him in the gully. The men were too dead-beat to travel very fast.

"'Ten-*shun!*" he commanded, reaching them.

They halted, stiffening up by habit.

But Slim Sikora burst out: "We're not going back! For God's sake, Lieutenant, maybe we can reach some camp before sun-up—"

"Not a chance. It's too far. You'll just burn yourselves out." Latham realized he was gasping, and paused; for an instant he thought he was going to slump onto his face on the ground. The dizziness passed, and he spoke, his burning throat cramping: "Come on back to camp. Headquarters will send a detail out for us, but that won't do you men a damn' bit of good if you wander off and kill yourselves."

But they were too panicky to listen to reason. Shorty McCoy and Lew S'Renco sprang at him—while the rest fell back pell-mell into the darkness. With his flashlight he knocked McCoy sprawling, and pivoted as S'Renco swung at him. But in the darkness another man hit him behind the ear, and he fell.

"He's down! Come on!" someone yelled hoarsely.

Fumbling at his holster, he dragged his automatic out. He shot blindly, into the air, twice, to startle them, to stop them.

But he heard a man gasp. Dismay a leaden sickness in his heart, he lurched to his feet. "'God'l'mighty," he thought, "if I've hit one of them—"

"Stop! *Stop!*" His voice was hoarse and grim with authority. Shocked into realization of what they were doing, the panicky men stiffened to attention.

"I'm hit."

It was S'Renco, and he was sobbing. The others gathered around him, then moved away as Latham picked up his flashlight and approached. Blood was streaming down S'Renco's right shoulder. Latham's hands shook as he looked at the wound; a couple of inches to the left and his bullet would have gone through the man's throat. As it was, the slug had not touched bone but had torn through the muscle slanting from the base of the neck. Not a bad wound under ordinary circumstances, but now—

"I'll bandage that back in camp. Come on, men!"

Soberly, for the seriousness of what they had just done was coming home to them, the men started back up the gully.

Not until then did Latham realize that his party was short two men: Slim Sikora and Steve Lefkowitz were gone.

He shouted their names into the darkness, but got no answer.

His impulse was to keep shouting, to hunt through the darkness for them. But he realized it was useless; they would avoid him. His parched lips tightened, and he reminded himself that his responsibility lay here, not with Sikora and Lefkowitz. They had taken their fate into their own hands.

WHEN Sergeant Garrity heard the gun-shots in the distance behind him, he stopped, and looked around, then waited, frowning.

Had that been a signal?

Presently he heard lurching foot steps, and he saw a flashlight beam wink on for a moment as the men following him picked their way past a rock pile. In the light he recognized Sikora.

"Hey, where you men going?" he demanded.

"We're h-huntin' you," stammered Sikora.

"Lieutenant Latham sent you after me?"

"That's right," Lefkowitz said. "He said for us to go with you."

"He did, huh?" Garrity was suspicious.

"Yeah. Y-you heard his two pistol shots, didn't you? He wanted you to wait for us."

"Well—come on. We're going to make time, though damned if you birds don't sound like you're pooped already."

"Nuts," Lefkowitz said sullenly. "Get goin', will you?"

When, some hours later, they reached the foot of the great alluvial fan and came out the lower end of the gully, Sergeant Garrity thought a moment, then headed his little party due south. The main highway along the border lay to the south, and traffic on it was heavy. What sort of terrain lay between them and that highway he did not know; but in actual miles, it would be much closer to that road than to the main base to the west.

They trudged along in the hot night without wasting precious breath on talk. Going was tough. Gully after gully slanted down out of the big alluvial slope, and they were constantly climbing up and sliding down and climbing up the walls of endless dry stream-beds. But finally they reached new country; walking was easy over a sagebrush flat—and then a huge frozen river of jagged lava, like black sponges frozen into iron, lay across their way.

"I'm done out," Lefkowitz groaned. "You guys go on."

"Damn you, you're coming along!" Garrity swore—he tried to shout, but his voice was a harsh rasping.

They moved onto the lava flow, paying for every step with labor that was agony. There still was no ease of coolness in the night, no pre-dawn

"That's no mirage!" said Garrity.

flow of cool air; and Garrity foresaw a day that would have accumulated heat from the previous one to intensify its torture. . . . He had to help Lefkowitz, who was stumbling so that he fell and gashed his knee on a jagged edge of lava rock. Lefkowitz was sobbing continuously now. Sikora was lurching along in dogged obliviousness of anything but the awful effort to keep setting one foot ahead of the other. The lava flow got rougher, a tumbled maze of jagged porous rock that looked light but was heavy and tough as iron.

By the time they had won to the barren plain beyond the lava, the summer dawn was outlining the scorched peaks to the east. The sun rose like a cauldron of fire, spilling a wash of heat across a world that seemed to undulate in recoil. Heat blazed down upon their heads, heat reflected back from the ground to sear their faces. Sergeant Garrity looked at the two men with him and realized that they would not last out the day.

"You mugs should've stayed with Lieutenant Latham," he muttered. They did not even hear him.

And as the sun arched up, Garrity knew for sure that this day would be hotter than yesterday, far hotter. And for the first time, into his strong self-confidence there burned an edge of doubt.

Ahead of them, towering dust-devils lifted half a mile into the sky, vast spinning columns of dust like fantastic genii spun out of a mind reeling with sickness. Startlingly, they moved like tan waterspouts across a mirage of sparkling water—that proved, when the three men lurched into it, to be a wide flat of dust so fine that their footsteps left no tracks in it—dust so fine it lifted to a mere breath of wind, and skirled up behind their staggering feet in an amazing cloud. A shift of wind wrapped them in the tawny cloud, and it choked and blinded them; Lefkowitz screamed in panic, tearing his shirt off his back, trying to run headlong.

Garrity finally got him quiet; but Garrity, then, felt his own knees shaking with weakness.

Travel became easier after they crossed a ridge and came out upon a smooth *pedregal*, a desert pavement of water-washed pebbles of jasper and agate and carnelian. Garrity was helping Lefkowitz constantly now, and Lefkowitz was babbling, out of his head. Slim Sikora still doggedly trudged along with bent head, but his bloodshot eyes held the glaze of semi-stupor.

Then at noon they came upon a vast *playa* of alkali—the smooth dry bed of a dead sea that had evaporated and left a deep layer of shimmering white salt upon the ground. That plain of alkali reflected the sun glare in a blazing white dazzle.

"Lord, it'll scorch the skin right off our faces!" Garrity muttered. He looked, shading his eyes, for a way around the alkali sink. But it was too wide and long. They'd have to go straight across.

Sikora was screeching something and pointing ahead. "See the water—and trees—" And Sikora lurched into a crazy run.

"Wait, you fool! You're seein' a mirage, that's all!" Garrity yelled. Sikora tottered on, not hearing him at all; and Garrity raged helplessly, "The dope's gone plumb nuts!"

Sikora stumbled and fell. And when Garrity, still helping Lefkowitz, reached Sikora, the soldier was digging into the hard alkali with his clawed fingers—digging frantically, crying and moaning.

"No use doin' that. Come on, Sikora, we got to keep movin'," Garrity urged him. When the soldier paid no heed, Garrity let Lefkowitz squat on the ground and going over, tried to lift Sikora onto his feet.

Sikora fought, wildly, crazily; he broke away from the sergeant and started running again, off to the east.

"All right, damn you, go on, go on!" Garrity yelled—and realized suddenly he was bawling and waving his arms, and stopped it, fear within him. "Damn it, am I goin' nuts, too?"

Somehow, he got Steve Lefkowitz onto his feet again. The soldier was limp, unresponsive; but Garrity got him moving again. Blindly, head averted and eyes almost shut against the torturing glare, the sergeant helped Lefkowitz along. It was coming hard, now. Garrity felt his heart pumping with a reedy, shaky rhythm that scared him. Setting one foot ahead of another each time took a fresh agony of effort. And he was practically carrying Lefkowitz.

When he neared the far side of the *playa*, he saw sand dunes ahead—tiny hummocks of sand gathered around single scraggly shrubs, but on beyond regular hills and escarpments of sand. "When I get there, I'll leave Lefkowitz—I'll go back and get that damn' loon of a Sikora—" he planned.

But when he eased Lefkowitz down on the sand and turned and looked back across the alkali sink, he couldn't see Sikora. Fitful gusts of wind kicked up wraithlike puffs of white alkali that danced and jittered and tumbled across the glaring *playa*. They hid Sikora, who must have sprawled flat on his face and was dusted over with a white powder, or was down in a depression in the alkali—

"Sikora!" Garrity bawled. But his voice was a harsh, rasping croak.

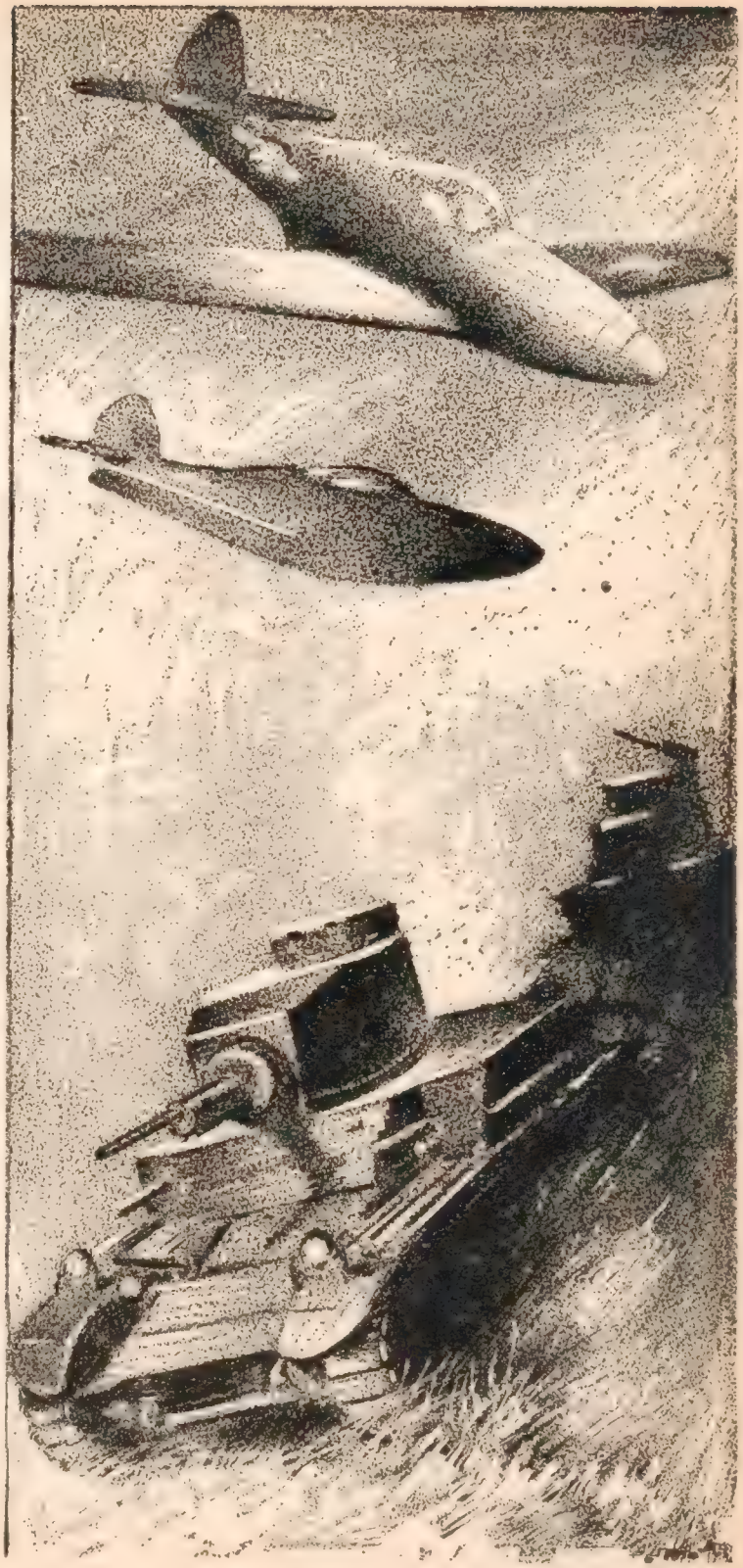
He started furiously to walk back to hunt for Sikora, and stumbled—and the acrid taste of alkali was smashed against his lips. Dazed and panicky, he sat up. Lord, he had no idea he was *that* used up!

Hunting for Sikora was out of the question. "Guess I better keep going as long as I can," he decided. "I got Lefkowitz to help too." He wanted to lie where he was, and rest. But just the thought of it intensified that panicky shakiness within him.

"You sit here, and you'll just give up! Get goin', damn it!" he told himself sternly.

THE sand of the dunes was light and fine, and gave way beneath shaky, straining footsteps. Garrity found himself cursing in exasperation, wasting precious breath and energy. And Lefkowitz was an increasing burden.

At the crest of the first dune, the lee side dropped away in a sheer little cliff, and they slid and fell down it. Garrity did not stir for a few moments, but lay where he fell. It was so good just to lie there, to forget, to quit— Somehow, he got to his feet; then getting Lefkowitz erect and started seemed to take effort out of Garrity's very heart. But they got started up the long slope of the next



"Enemy" forces kept streaming out of that pass in the Pelegro Range.

dune. . . . A little whisper of fine sand curled off the smooth perfection of the swell of the dune, a musical little hissing swirl of sand that drifted off the dune like a singing puff of smoke. Such a tiny little movement of sand—but that's how the dunes marched over a country; that's how these wrinkles and hummocks and hills and mountains of sand would soon be covering a man's body—two men's bodies, two mugs named Lefkowitz and Garrity. "Oh, yeah? Like hell they will!"

He was talking to himself, Garrity realized; he was moaning and choking out a crazy mumble the way Lefkowitz had been doing a while ago.

UP one dune, down again, up another. Were the dunes getting larger? He had less strength left each time he had to drag Lefkowitz up. He'd have to leave Lefkowitz—have to! He was playing out. And this damned sand—for each step forward you took two steps back, it seemed! And it was getting hotter, hotter; the sun bounced back off this sand like a battery of flame-throwers. . . . These dunes looked all alike. Be a fine thing if he was traveling in circles! Could be. His brain felt as if it was spinning in a hot frying-pan. . . The sun was arching down into the west, now; he could tell by the lengthening shadow on the lee side of the sand ridges. *Keep going, keep going, keep going*—

He wasn't hauling Lefkowitz along any more, he realized with a start. Hell, he was flat on his face! Must've been lying this way for some time. There was Lefkowitz, back behind him at the foot of the dune, just lying there. "Come on, get up onto your feet! Get going, guy!" he told himself grimly.

"Look at 'em," Ross breathed. "Boy, oh, boy!"

But he couldn't—he couldn't get onto his feet. He could barely hunch onto his knees, barely manage to crawl. No use going back after Lefkowitz, lying so still; better keep on crawling. . . . When he reached the crest of the dune, he pitched and rolled to the bottom. And there ahead was still another dune that stretched to infinity on either side, that rose steep and high—behind that, would be another and another to the end of the world and time.

He inched up it, his swollen bloodshot eyes clamped tight; he stomached up in a stubborn, animal-like crawling as primitive as the mindless surging of an amœba. Somehow, he got to the top; and there he slumped.

"You're done, you're finished," he thought. "You haven't got another inch of fight in you—"

Consciousness flickered in him. He looked ahead. Below this dune, at the foot of the tawny slope, lay a river. It flowed with a rippling current that sparkled with cool life—a broad deep stream that gurgled with a deep low music. . . . A mirage, a lousy mirage, to torment a guy with its invitation!

"Good God, that's no mirage!"

In his realization he actually raised up onto his elbows. This was no mirage. He had actually reached his goal! This was the main irrigation ditch of the Imperial Valley! This was the All-American Canal that brought water right through the blazing desert to the fabulously rich farms and date groves of Imperial! Beyond it a mile or two would be the main highway—

He tried to get up onto hands and knees to crawl, but could not. With clawed hands he tried to drag himself along on his stomach toward that stream of water. He actually pulled himself forward a few inches. Then he slumped inert. . . Consciousness faded from Sergeant Garrity's body.

LIEUTENANT LATHAM tensed, and then whipped the binoculars to his eyes. Pulse racing, he studied that V in the Pelegro Range. Had he really seen a movement in the pass? Or was the heat finally getting him? Disappointed, he lowered the binoculars.

Behind him, under the camouflage net hiding the half-track, his five men lay sprawled in numb misery. Lew S'Renco's wounded neck was bandaged and had quit bleeding; but he had fever now, and occasionally mumbled senselessly. Latham had used most of the pulp from that *viznaga* cactus for Mike Ryan, squeezing moisture from the rubbery pulp into Ryan's mouth. But Ryan lay in a stupor. And Latham was profoundly afraid.

Abruptly he lifted the binoculars to his eyes again.

"Yes, by God! They're coming through! They're coming!"

He didn't realize that he had exclaimed aloud, but his men heard him. Joe Ross and Shorty McCoy lurched to their feet and pressed against the wall of the cut-bank beside him.

"What d'you see, Lieutenant?"

"Those Blue Army tanks comin'?"

"Coming *fast!* See 'em?"

Through the V notch in the Pelegro Range, a spearheading force of tanks was filing swiftly. A strong force, and the roar of their motors rolled down the great alluvial fan in a drumming thunder. The Blue Army brains was attempting a swift, overwhelming surprise attack, gambling their main strength in throwing an unexpected avalanche of metal against the soft rear of the Red Army dispositions. Lieutenant Latham watched as the first columns of light tanks came out of the pass and deployed into broader formation. There should be heavier, sixty-ton behemoths— Yes, there they came—land leviathans that made the earth tremble and filled the air with the heavy vibration of their engines!

No planes, as yet. The Blue planes probably were being very ostentatiously busy just now—somewhere else. *Feinting!* Drawing Red strength away, luring it farthest from where it would be needed.

Thoughts ran through Latham's brain:

"Okay, get on your radio now! Send your message! These Blue tanks are rolling into a trap—if you spring the trap right. If you're too slow, they'll make the trap backfire!"

He whirled and hauled himself up into the half-track and grabbed up headphones and transmitter of the radio. Ross and McCoy yelled, their haggard faces lighting up. And Latham thought fleetingly that they were going to be disappointed.

"Flight 17, to Coachella Field," he said into his microphone. "Starboard engine failing. Request permission to land."

He waited, conscious that Ross and McCoy were staring at him as if they could not believe their senses. He got his answer in the earphones, then: a curt, formal permission to land—and he switched off the radio and removed the earphones.

"That was our prearranged code message," he told Ross and McCoy. "If the Blue tank men have overheard it, they'll figure it's some flyer out over Coachella Valley talking to his base."

"But you didn't tell Headquarters about *us!*"

"You d-didn't ask 'em to send us a truck with water!"

"No. That would've given us away. Those Blue Army tanks would know their surprise attack is a bust."

"But, Lord a'mighty, we'll d-die out here—"

"You should've asked for help!"

"Would you have asked for help," Latham answered,—and his haggard young face was very stern,—"if this were North Africa?"

They thought a moment. Ross turned away, biting his cracked and swollen lip. McCoy said, "I g-guess not, sir."

Latham put his hand on McCoy's shoulder a moment, and smiled.

"You men watch now!"

They watched as "enemy" forces kept streaming out of that pass in the Pelegro Range. Tanks, and still more tanks; and then trucks of infantrymen and engineers. They added up to a powerful force, and Latham began to feel concern. Unless his own Red Army superiors met this onslaught soon, the Blues would score a decisive victory in these maneuvers.

Then he heard it! A far-off rumble perceptible now over the roar of the "enemy" tanks. Planes coming!

"Look at 'em," Ross breathed. "Boy, oh, boy!"

AIRACOBRAS, with their deadly nose cannon, 37-mm. guns that the Russians were using with such deadly effect on the Kharkov front. V upon V of them, swooping in at strafing level to smash those Blue Army tanks! And following the huge formation of P-39's came a mightier formation of two-motor attack bombers, swooping in on the tails of the fighter planes to fling their bombs into the formations of Blue Army tanks.

The tanks dispersed, firing the anti-aircraft machine-guns on their turrets —wildly the neat formations of land dreadnaughts broke apart and fled, stampeding for space, losing all semblance of that irresistible advance of mechanical might they had presented so short a while before. Back in the mountain pass, trucks halted, crowding together in confusion as they tried to turn back. Airacobras swooped low through the pass. If this had not been mock war but the real thing, Latham realized, the mountain gap would now be a tragic shambles. . . . And after the armada of aircraft, to destroy the Blue tanks which the planes had scattered and theoretically crippled, came Red formations of tank-destroyers and self-propelled 90-mm. cannon, rolling in from the west.

The mighty Blue surprise maneuver was defeated. . . .

Lieutenant Latham commanded:

"Ross! You, McCoy—get out there and flag down a couple of those tank-destroyers, and borrow some cans of water, while I radio for an ambulance."

By radio, Lieutenant Latham asked for medical aid—and asked that planes look for Sergeant Garrity and the two privates who had disobeyed orders and left his detail.

SLIM SIKORA was found in the alkali sink. Steve Lefkowitz was found in the sand dunes, near the All-American Canal—and Sergeant Garrity was found lying at the very edge of the river of irrigating water. All three were dead. . .

Thoughtfully, Lieutenant Latham discussed the three men with his battalion commander, next day. Latham blamed himself. If he had been stronger, wiser, he might have saved the three men.

"And if you had been *less* competent," the Major retorted, "you would have lost your whole detail. If the rest of your men had stampeded the way Sikora and Lefkowitz did, they'd have died of heat-exhaustion, too. What men don't understand is that discipline is not only a necessary element of offensive strength, but a safeguard for themselves, as well."

"Yes sir." Latham nodded. "Discipline saves the weak. It gives them the strength of the group."

"It saves the strong, too," the Major said. "Do you know what Sergeant Garrity died of?"

"Heat-exhaustion, like the other two."

"Not according to this medical report. Remember, he was found lying beside the water, down in the All-American Canal. He died of drinking *too much* water, *too fast,* for the condition he was in. Do you see my point, Lieutenant?"

"Not exactly, sir."

"Sikora and Lefkowitz were weaker than the average. They didn't make it to the Canal. Sergeant Garrity was stronger than average. He reached water. But they're *all* dead. The first two men lacked strength, so they died. Garrity had strength, but lacked savvy, so he died."

"If they had stayed with the group, they'd have lived."

"Exactly! In anarchy, the weak and the witless are equally lost. But if disciplined to a group capably led, both the weak and the witless will survive while the group survives. Discipline gives the whole group strength and the whole group wisdom. Discipline keeps the weak up to the mark, and holds the strong-but-reckless back in place. That's why an army without discipline is just a mob."

"And a mob, with discipline, is an army. But that discipline has to be imposed by the men themselves, or it'll break, when most needed. If those two men of mine hadn't run off from camp as they did, they'd be alive right now."

"That's right." The older officer nodded soberly. Then he smiled. "By the way, Captain, how about wearing the proper insignia from now on?"

"*Captain?*" Latham gulped.

"Yes. Your promotion has come through. You've earned it, too. Think you can live up to the responsibility?"

Latham smiled back. "I can try, sir."

"That's all I ask. Knowing you, I know it'll be a damn' good try! Congratulations!"

PIPELINE *to*

by Major Peter W. Rainier

WATER supply was my job, of course. My repairs had been organized long since as far as it was possible while the magnitude of the damage to the pipeline was an unknown quantity. Throughout the dozen miles of the battle zone I could assess the damage roughly. The pipeline there would be literally cut to bits by shell fire and the maneuvering of tanks, but beyond the battle zone I had no yardstick with which to measure the demolitions which the retreating enemy might accomplish. Would he blow up the pipeline every hundred yards or only every mile? Would he run his retreating tanks over it in those long stretches where the pipe lay on the surface? There was only one means of finding out. I must drive along that pipeline to see. . . .

On the morning of November 5th I got word from Brigadier Kisch that the enemy was in full retreat. Sending back orders by Don R to my working companies at Burgh-el-Arab I drove to the Tel-el-Eisa ridge where I had stood so many times during the days that the battle of Alamein had been in progress. Behind me in vehicles were a couple of dozen sappers, my mine-lifting party, ready to clear the pipeline of mines and booby traps so that the working parties could do their repair job with a modicum of safety. About 400 yards west of the ridge we came to the first minefield.

Four sappers tuned up their mine detectors. The mine detector consists of a delicate mechanism operated by means of an electric battery strapped to the sapper's back. It is fixed to the end of a handle like that of a broom. The sapper walks forward slowly, sweeping the device methodically from side to side, an inch or so above the ground. When the mechanism passes over metal a buzzing sounds in the earphones which the sapper wears. Mine cases are usually made of metal, so the chances are that when the mine detector buzzes there is some explosive buried a few inches below the surface of the ground. Sometimes the enemy seemed to run short of mines temporarily and when that happened he would alternate real mines with old tins or any bit of metal he could find. The scrap metal bombs would cause as much delay in lifting as a real mine. Later the enemy was to cost us some casualties by making rough mine cases out of wood.

Now, along the pipeline four minesweeping sappers walk forward abreast, behind each comes another sapper with a bayonet in hand. Slowly they advance, their mechanisms sweeping from side to side so as to cover every inch of ground. One careless moment by one of them may leave a mine to kill a friend.

After a few yards one sapper pauses, his mechanism held motionless. The sapper behind him walks cautiously up to him, prods diagonally with his bayonet at the indicated spot and uncovers one side of the evil yellow disc of a Teller mine. The bayonet digs cautiously all around it. Then the sapper feels cautiously under it with his hand to find any booby trap wires which may be attached. If there are no wires he lifts the Teller and lays it on the ground. The minesweeping proceeds. Behind the minesweepers come sappers laying white tape to mark accurately the edges of the area which has been swept. Still more sappers disarm the mines by removing the detonators. Then they stack the now harmless bombs along the edge of the cleared track. The last gang fences off the edge of the "safe lane" with barbed wire on steel pickets and sets up the red and white warning signs for mines. There is now a safe lane eight yards wide. In the center of it runs the pipeline and dangerous edges of it are wired off and marked with danger signs. Slow work, but that is how lanes are cleared through minefields. . . .

Next morning I left my gangs at work and drove westward along the pipeline with Mersa Matruh as my objective, to measure up the gap where the enemy had removed an unknown length of pipe. Parallel with my route, and a mile to the northward, ran the coastal tarmac road, packed tight with our transport pressing hard on the heels of the retreating foe. Somewhere too out in the desert beyond the western horizon swift armored cars, tanks and Bren-carriers were harrying the enemy rearguard from ridge to ridge. Somewhere in the desert spaces to the southward an armored division was making a wide sweep across country to intercept the enemy before he could cross the border. Planes cruised low over the desert, dropping water and food to exhausted Italians who were trudging sadly in to surrender.

As I passed through Sidi-Abdel-Rahman I saw one of the guns which had held us up the day before. One of our shells seemed to have exploded right in the gun pit. The gun carriage was wrecked and the long barrel of the gun pointed skyward like the blasted trunk of a lightning-riven tree. The gun pit itself was a shambles. German dead lay in heaps. At the entrance of the gun pit flies crawled over the unrecognizable fragments of a man. The German gun crew had been annihilated by a lucky shot from an Australian gun. But they had sold their lives dearly. On the plain before the gun lay the blackened hulks of three of our tanks. Those Germans of the 90th Light Panzer Division had the stuff. They had fought to the death to give their main body of troops a better chance to escape. . . .

TEN miles west of Daba I heard the sharp W-H-A-N-G of anti-tank guns ahead. Cautiously I drove forward. When I topped the next rise I counted twenty tanks in the hollow below me and the swastika and palm tree decorated their sides. Some of them were "brewing up," black pillars of smoke rising high over the desert. They had all obviously been knocked out by the firing. . . .

I drove down among them. The first one I passed was blazing and by the revolting smell of burning flesh I judged that the crew were still inside. The next tank seemed intact except for a small hole in the turret. I

BATTLE*

The officer who supplied the water for Montgomery's army across the African desert, concludes his story.

Who wrote "African Pioneer" and "Green Fire" for Blue Book

climbed up to the manhole, still in my quest for field glasses. One glance into the belly of that tank and I swore that not for all the field glasses in the world would I look into another knocked-out tank. The shell must have careened around and around inside the tank after it had entered, then exploded. A mangled pile of flesh and clothing lay in the bottom of the tank. On top of the bleeding mass lay a severed hand. I lost interest in field glasses and proceeded on my way. . . .

Into Mersa Matruh, now free of Germans, I drove. Here at least I should find a pair of field glasses in some military store. But the moment I drove into town a group of Italian soldiers rushed at me from the veranda of a building. My hand dropped to my revolver. Then I relaxed. They were unarmed and they had their hands over their heads. I looked them over for field glasses but they were barren ground. Waving them out of my way I drove on. From all directions Italians came surging toward me, hands in air. There wasn't a single pair of field glasses among the hundred or two that I looked over. I seemed to be the only British occupant of the town as yet and every Italian seemed in a hurry to surrender and get settled in some nice comfortable Prisoners-of-War camp, where he could draw his rations regularly. I shooed them away. They were sad, dispirited, the wastage of a defeated army. The police could pick them up when they got into town. There was no chance of their getting away even if they had wanted to, which they didn't.

I wanted to find a military store and rummage for field glasses before the rest of the Army caught up with me and spoiled my chances. The town was a mournful ruin. Hardly a building had a roof on it. Our bombing had completed the demolition which young Archibald had so well begun. Down near the Lido Hotel was a building which looked intact. The veranda seemed stacked with cases of stores. It looked like the very place I was hunting for.

I walked inside gingerly. The first thing that caught my eye was a small electric bulb burning in a lamp bracket on the table. Headlight bulbs were scarce. I used them for lighting my tent, so that I could write at night. But why was this bulb burning in broad daylight? From a safe distance I examined the lamp bracket, being careful where I placed my feet. It was obviously home made but a nice enough job. There seemed a familiar contour to the bulbous base of it. By God, the base of that lamp bracket was a Mills hand grenade. Cold chills ran down my spine. The hand which unscrewed that bulb from the bracket would break the electric circuit and explode the grenade. With care, stepping as though on hot plates, I traced the wiring from the bracket, along the wall to an inviting looking switch. That switch was death to the man who touched it. Back into the next room I traced the wiring, which led down into a box which presumably held the batteries. But there must have been more than batteries in that box. It was as large as an office desk. I lost all interest in field glasses. I had no business there anyway. All buildings were out of bounds in our advance until the Bomb Disposal experts had "deloused" them by removing booby traps and had declared them safe. The Bomb Disposal boys would emasculate that Mills hand grenade and any other similar gadgets. So I gingerly tiptoed from that place of lurking death and drove straight out of town.

That day I measured up the gap in the pipeline and turned back eastward, passing weary-looking squads of unescorted prisoners making their way to the nearest Prisoners-of-War cage, behind whose barbed-wire fence they could find food and drink.

I—The Battle of Medenine

IN COMPARISON with Benghasi, Tripoli seemed alive. In Tripoli people still walked about their business among camels, donkeys, pariah dogs and the stench seemingly inseparable from a North African town. Both Arab and Italian inhabitants alike seemed to welcome their new conquerors.

In the green oasis of Tripoli we rested for nearly a month while sappers and sailors from the Navy toiled to clear the harbor and while the veteran Seventh Armored Division, alone, pushed slowly westward to clear the last vestiges of the enemy from soil that had once been Italian. During that month Churchill visited us once more and found a vastly different Eighth Army from the frustrated force he had known in the days after the great retreat from Knightsbridge. The Eighth Army staged a triumphal march for Churchill that would not have disgraced one of the famous peacetime reviews of the regular Army on Salisbury Plain.

There was no sign of desert grime on those troops marching past the saluting point where the Eighth Army leader and the leader of the Empire stood stiffly at attention. They had brushed the desert from them to honor their leaders. . . .

Their leaders paid them honor too. Churchill spoke. He thanked the Eighth Army for what it had done. "When the war is over," said Churchill, "if any man asks you what you have done in the war it will be sufficient to say 'I marched with the Eighth Army'."

The situation at the middle of February was that the Seventh Armored Division was sitting on the Tunisian border and sending their patrols into French territory beyond. As yet there had been an insufficiency of supplies for more than one division at the front. By this time the mouth of the harbor had been unstoppered and the unloading capacity of the port of Tripoli was already

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approximating the tonnage necessary for our three spearhead divisions to cross the border and attack the strong Mareth Line, thus initiating the last and decisive phase of our long pursuit. The New Zealand and Highland Divisions were still resting in the neighborhood of Tripoli. Back in the region of Benghasi were three more divisions which would be needed in the series of bitter battles which loomed between us and the final annihilation of the enemy. There were about 40,000 troops, all told.

On the German side Rommel had been given the supreme command in Tunisia, where it was estimated he now commanded some 200,000 Germans and Italians. Two hundred thousand against the short 40,000 which our three divisions could muster. But on the other side of Rommel the British and American forces mustered some 40,000 more. In assessing the relative strength for the Tunisian campaign that was now to begin, the Allied force had about 80,000 men. Rommel's 200,000 included an unduly large proportion of non-combatant personnel from all the bases we had forced him to evacuate as we drove him back from Egypt. It seems fair to assess the number of fighting troops on either side as about even. In tanks we had a great superiority and a good advantage in guns. . . .

WE HAD Rommel penned now. There was no more limitless terrain behind him, even should he elude the American thrust.

But before we could hope to finish Rommel we must drive him from the Mareth Line. That was really a strong position. The French had made a regular Maginot Line of it to keep the Italians out. Air photos showed it to be bristling with strongpoints and communication trenches. Protecting the Mareth Line itself was the soon-to-be-famous Wadi Zigzau, as well as wide fields of mines. To tackle the Mareth Line we should need our full six divisions, but as yet our supply problem had pinned three of those divisions back in Benghasi.

Then Rommel struck. Marshaling the veteran divisions of his old Afrika Korps he drove against the Americans at Maknassy. They fought like heroes, but they were as yet unblooded, and no green troops on earth could hope for victory against the pick of the German Army.

The Americans were camped on a wide plain between two jagged ranges of mountains whose jagged peaks pierced the blue of the Tunisian sky. The plain swept to the foot of the mountains, patchworked red and yellow with poppies and daisies like a colorful sea. Then Rommel's Panzer divisions came roaring at them through the mountain passes. The Americans fought like tigers, but the Panzers rolled them back 100 miles to Tebessa and threatened to outflank the whole of the Allied position in Tunisia.

The situation was grave. Rommel was fighting desperately for more terrain of maneuver, and that terrain must at all costs be denied him or the finishing of the North African campaign might be indefinitely prolonged. Further, on the prompt termination of that campaign depended greatly the success of our projected invasion of Southern Europe.

General Alexander, who recently had been transferred from Cairo to act as deputy under American General Eisenhower, signaled Montgomery to do what he could against the Mareth Line to create a diversion. Montgomery moved up the Highland Division to the Tunisian border. Together with the Seventh Armored Division the Highlanders dashed at the Mareth Line. Lightly held, the three outer bastions of Ben Gardane, Foum Tetuan and Medenine fell to us within three days, and our two divisions pressed against the main defenses of the Mareth Line itself.

The diversion worked and saved the situation. With success literally at his finger tips Rommel perforce abandoned his offensive against the western defenses. Marshaling all his forces he was compelled to strain every nerve to reach the Mareth Line before we could deploy our troops for a regular assault.

It was now the turn of the Eighth Army to be in deadly peril. We had two isolated divisions facing a line twenty miles long. West of that fortified area, at right angles to it, lay a chain of rugged hills with peaks ranging up to 2,000 feet in height. Those hills were also held by the enemy and were traversed by several good military roads, constructed by the French for the express purpose of outflanking any attack of the Mareth Line. Those French had envisioned themselves as holding the Mareth Line against invading Italians but, by a strange twist in the swirling vortex of the war, the Germans and Italians were holding the Mareth Line and the British Eighth Army attacking it. Our left flank was completely in the air. Those two divisions at the Mareth Line easily could be annihilated if Rommel should send a strong outflanking force through the western mountain passes. He was too shrewd a general to neglect the weakness of our position and his Panzer divisions were already thundering southward from Tebessa.

Montgomery coolly assessed the situation. He calculated that the earliest date on which Rommel could get into position for a major attack was March 3rd. If Rommel should attack through the passes by then it was almost a certainty that he could annihilate our two divisions committed to the Mareth Line, as it was impossible for our remaining division, the New Zealanders, to reinforce us before March 4th. The New Zealanders could reach us from Tripoli by March 4th. But it would take them a day to dig themselves in and master their terrain against the coming strong attack. Therefore the first day on which we could call ourselves safe would be March 5th. From March 5th onward the Eighth Army would give Rommel a hot welcome.

The affair resolved itself into a race between Rommel rushing southward for our destruction with three Panzer divisions to add to the four Italian divisions in the Mareth Line and the New Zealanders racing westward for our salvation. Day by day our "recce" planes gave us news of Rommel's concentrations. March 3rd passed. On that day the advance guard of the New Zealanders reached us after a thirty-hour march, but Rommel's forces were massing behind the Mareth Line and the dust clouds from the mountain passes warned us that he was preparing the expected flank attack.

ON LEAVING Tripoli I had attached myself to the mess of the C.R.E. of the forward corps to which our three spearhead divisions belonged. This mess was a South African crowd. The C.R.E., himself, was a South African mining magnate who had fought his way up the ladder to success in civilian life by the same sheer competence and grit which was now bringing him a series of rapid promotions and a row of decorations across his chest. Lieutenant Colonel Scott had surrounded himself with a staff of young South African mining engineers, among them one Hoffman. He was one of those rare men who radiate sweetness without the least trace of effeminacy. He was slight of build and of medium height with a self-effacing manner. Hoffy, the "Pathfinder." His was the responsibility of finding practicable routes through the desert. . . . It was a hazardous job which entailed picking a way through an enemy minefield with one eye on the lookout for a passable route and the other on the ground to watch for mines. The proof that he was careful lay in the fact that he still survived after nearly 2,000 miles of pathfinding. He never set foot to ground in

suspicious territory before examining the surface for the signs of disturbed earth which would tell of buried mines. He attracted me at our first meeting and we were close friends before I had been in the mess many days. I was slow to form friendships by then because it hurt too much when the friends were buried. With Hoffy and the rest of the C.R.E. mess I moved up to Medenine. The drilling rigs followed. I did not anticipate need to drill for water in Tunisia near the coast where there is a plenitude of wells, but operations might demand an inland outflanking sweep and the rigs would come in handy for that. . . .

At daybreak of March 6 Rommel's Panzer divisions poured through the mountain defiles and spread across the coastal plain as they deployed for attack. Then they came roaring at us, while at the same moment the Italian infantry emerged from the defenses of the Mareth Line in frontal assault.

The battle of Medenine was a gunners' battle throughout. Our artillery held their fire till the range became deadly, till they could see the "whites of the eyes" of the charging tanks. Then they sat back and picked the tanks off as fast as they came on. When the infantry mustered to support the tanks they loosed a "stonk" on them and wiped them off the face of the earth.

The "stonk" had been one of our surprises for the enemy at Alamein. It implies one central control for all artillery. Thus, when a juicy target is reported, every gun within range can be immediately brought to bear, instead of merely the guns on that immediate sector. It used to take our artillery less than two minutes from the time the target was sighted till that target was blasted off the earth by the fire of hundreds of guns. Medenine was the second battle in which we had employed the "stonk." The Afrika Korps hadn't then found out how to do it, but they must have learned at Medenine because they pulled "stonks" on us thereafter, and we didn't like them much.

All day the furious artillery bellowed at the enemy and roused the echoes in the high hills from which he had emerged to annihilate us. Wave after wave of the enemy's attack was swept away. Wave after wave roared toward our gun line to meet the same fate. But the attacking Panzers never got near enough even to find their way through the gap we had left for their destruction.

Then darkness fell. All that night we lay waiting for the attack to be renewed, but in the darkness the enemy flitted. He had lost fifty-two tanks, and many of his guns had been destroyed. His casualties must have been heavy. I have heard various estimates, but about 5,000 would be my guess. We had slightly over 100 casualties in killed and wounded and lost not a single tank.

Before the battle Rommel had harangued his men. "If the enemy retains Medenine," he had told them, "the days of the German in Africa are numbered." Rommel was right.

IV—The Beast is Brought to Bay at Last

THE hunt was on at daybreak, the morning after Ankerit. The great central plain of Tunisia, with its network of splendid roads, was ahead of us now. We had traversed the desert and had attained green fields at last. Like a great spate the Eighth Army swept northward. Along the coast the Highlanders were overrunning Rommel's rear guard wherever it tried to stand. West of the Highlanders, on a fifty-mile front, the other divisions were driving hard against the scattered groups of the enemy, while on our left flank the Americans burst like an avalanche through the Faid Pass in the mountains and joyously joined in the hunt. We had at last effected a junction with those Americans. Starting from opposite sides of a continent, we had fought our way to meet in the middle. No longer were we playing a lone hand against the enemy; we now had a partner in the game. A little later I was to visit the American troops and be welcomed like a brother.

I was the first Eighth Army man that particular brigade had seen. There was a rush for cameras and lenses clicked like machine guns. I stayed with them some time, and every hour my opinion of them rose. They were splendidly equipped. How wonderful seemed that new equipment beside that of our worn and weathered Eighth Army! They were camped in a huge plain spangled with flowers. There were dark objects standing among the flowers in the plain like grazing cattle in the distance. Those dark objects were burned-out American tanks. This was the battleground where green American troops had stood up to the Panzer onrush of Rommel's veteran Afrika Korps. Long rows of American graves lay beside the road marked with simple wooden crosses. But there were plenty of German graves, too, with the ornate Gothic type of cross which the Hun effects.

Those Americans had been overrun, but they had finally reformed and driven back their enemy.

I left with several impressions. First, that the way in which they organized their camps was considerably better than the Eighth Army method. Second, that their fire power was considerably heavier per man than ours. Third, that they were trying to live in too Spartan a manner. The Eighth Army soldier had very little equipment to begin with, but three years of campaigning have taught him to make himself comfortable, even in the desert. Fourth, that they were as keen and hard as we were, which is saying a lot.

But the trait that impressed me most of all was their willingness to learn. They realized that the Eighth Army had years of active service against their months. They were eager for information.

"Say, how in the name of Jehoshaphat did you guys get across that Wadi Zigzau we've been reading 'bout in orders?" drawled a lanky young major.

"We made scaling ladders and the infantry went up them with the bayonet."

"Wasn't anyone shooting at the infantry?"

"Yes. They did it under heavy machine-gun fire."

"They climbed up a ladder while they were being shot at and then went and stuck bayonets into the Fritzies?"

"Yes. That's the only way we know to shift Jerry—with the bayonet."

"Couldn't you shoot him out of his position?"

"You can't shift him by shooting. We learned that long ago."

The major shook his head meditatively. "Maybe you're right at that. We were shooting and shooting for days and Fritzie didn't seem to mind a bit."

I liked those Americans. So did the Eighth Army when the two forces got acquainted. The Eighth Army is ready to pull in double harness with them, and that is saying a lot because the men of that force set a high standard.

On the morning after the battle I drove through the Wadi Ankerit and saw a bulldozer pushing heaps of enemy dead into the anti-tank ditch for burial. Then I hastened north. I had a water problem ahead of me. There are numerous small wells in the central plain of Tunisia but it has no centralized water supply, except for the town supplies of Sfax and Sousse, brought in huge pipelines from the mountains 100 miles to the westward. It was urgent that I should assess the damage to those pipelines and organize their repair. I drove through vast olive groves. Between the wide-spaced olive trees was the green of barley, splotched red with thick masses

of poppies. I had never seen so many poppies in all my life before.

Some miles beyond Ankerit I was forced to stop at a crossroads while sappers repaired a road crater some distance ahead. The road was packed with traffic, nose to tail. Jock swung our old Morris off the road. Some fifty yards off we stopped to brew some tea. While Jock placed the blackened pot on the smoky petrol fire I noticed a car pull up at the crossroads. The driver stepped out of the car onto the earthen shoulder. A small black object seemed to spring from the ground and explode in his face. He fell. Across the road another man fell. The driver had stepped on an "S" mine which had blown off his face and wounded the man across the road.

That shocked me more than it should have. Back in the grim reaches of the desert, death had seemed natural. The useless desert was fit for nothing but war and death. But here was a smiling paradise built for happiness. Children should have been playing in those gay meadows, fashioning wreaths of flowers. Yet a dead man lay by the roadside, his face a red horror, while on a mass of scarlet poppies lay an Indian soldier, groaning, a crimson stream spurting from a hole in his thigh. After calling a medical corpsman for him, I went on.

BY LATE afternoon I had reached the outskirts of Mahares, a village twenty miles short of Sfax. All day we had fought our way forward through dense traffic, all pushing forward in pursuit. Now we seemed to be among guns. There were rows of them by the roadside, while in a near-by barley field a wedge of tanks stood motionless, expectant, or moved restlessly about. At the edge of the village a tall officer was giving orders to a group around him. It occurred to me that I had worked my way farther forward than I had intended. I walked over to the tall officer to ask him "the score."

Not till I was face to face with him did I notice the crossed swords on his shoulder strap. A general, by God. It was General Wimperley, commander of the Highland Division.

I gulped.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, very courteously.

I saluted. "Sorry, Sir, but I didn't notice your badge of rank."

"That's all right. What can I do for you?"

"I'm Royal Engineers. On water 'recce,' Sir."

"Good God, man." His tone was still courteous. "You can't 'recce' water in the middle of a battle. The enemy is still holding the other end of this village. You are too far forward. Get back and get your vehicle off the road so that my guns can have a chance to come up."

I saluted again and turned back. I had always wanted to watch a general directing a battle. Now I had seen one. I admired his coolness. If I were a general busy with a battle and some damned fool came up to me looking for water, I am sure I wouldn't have been so courteous.

The Highlanders took Sfax at daybreak next morning. By sunrise I traveled in their wake. At a little hamlet called Chaffar, just north of Mahares, there was a line of abandoned guns at a bend in the road. Fifty yards in front of the guns was one of our Bren-carriers with a round hole in its frontal armor. The Bren-carrier was splashed crimson; that entering shell had torn its occupants to bits. There were German dead around the guns. The Highland Division Bren-carriers had charged up to the mouth of those guns in true cavalry style.

April 20, 1943. One month after our assault on the Mareth Line and two weeks after the storming of Wadi Ankerit, I stood on a rise of land by the little coast town of Enfidaville. South of me stretched rolling grasslands, splashed red and yellow with masses of poppies and daisies. From our landing grounds to the southward, flights of planes rushed forward axle deep in flowers and leaped skyward. The sky was darkened with them as they droned overhead to blast the crowded forces of the enemy we had trapped at last. On one of those landing grounds stood a huge Flying Fortress, a great hawk among the wasplike swarm of fighter planes. General Eisenhower had been as good as his word. Montgomery had earned his Flying Fortress.

North of me rose the mountains of Tunisia, ridge after ridge, peak behind peak. Between, our guns were thundering as they covered the Eighth Army going in to assault.

The Beast was at bay at last. Rommel's Afrika Korps and Italians had been herded into the same pen with Von Arnim and his much-vaunted German infantry divisions. The Eighth Army was driving home its culminating attack against an enemy for whom there was no escape. On the left flank of the Eighth Army were Americans and French. On their left again the British First Army. Beyond the British First Army were more French. A long curved line, both flanks on the sea, was pressing inexorably inward, hammering the enemy to death, while in the air and on the sea our Allied Air Forces and Navies had their grip on the windpipe of his supplies, blasted his huge transport planes earthward, sinking his ships by bomb, torpedo and gunfire.

For my own part, my work was done. The water systems of Sfax and Sousse had been restored and full watercarts sloshed and clattered in the wake of the Eighth Army. Those mountains to the northward were seamed with running streams; there was no need to develop water resources there.

Mine had been the responsibility for supplying water to the Eighth Army. I had supplied it. They had not suffered thirst as added torture to their trials.

In those ten months the daily water ration had only twice, for but a few days each time, dropped below a full gallon for each Eighth Army man. A gallon of water a day approximates luxury in desert campaigning.

As my eyes watched the shell-bursts round Enfidaville my mind reached back along the road I had traveled. Suddenly I felt very tired. Three years, 2,000 miles. It was a long hard road to look back on. Along that road were many milestones, those milestones the graves of friends. The Eighth Army had in three years fought twelve pitched battles and numberless smaller frays. It had suffered some 250,000 casualties and inflicted on the enemy three times that number.

RELENTLESSLY the Eighth Army drove forward. Enfidaville was ours on the first day of the assault. Farther westward the little hill village of Takarouna was resisting strongly. The wild Maori battalion of the New Zealand Division fought their furious way upward toward the crest of Takarouna hill, through the mud-roofed Arab dwellings which clustered like swallows' nests on the almost precipitous slope. When one house had been stormed, the Maoris broke a hole in the roof and clambered through it to attack the house above, blasting the defenders with hand grenades, hurling them bodily over the steep cliffs. Nothing could stop those Maoris. Nothing could stop the Eighth Army.

In the first two days' fighting the objective was taken. The first ridge of the Tunisian mountains was ours. German General Von Arnim—Rommel had fled to Italy—rushed all his available reserves to the southward to stop the Eighth Army's progress.

Having drawn the German reserves, our present mission had been accomplished and we paused.

Meanwhile our combined British and American Air Forces had been blasting the enemy from above. Cap-

ured landing grounds in Tunisia, Algeria and Tripolitania, even the airports of war-tortured Malta to whom now came her chance of vengeance, formed a ring around the northern tip of Tunisia where nearly 400,000 of the enemy were fighting desperately at bay. Nearly 400,000 men, hundreds of guns, tens of thousands of vehicles had been herded into a pen not more than 300 square miles in extent.

Never in war had such a target been delivered to any Air Force. Our planes darkened the air by day and cleft the darkness of night with the flash of their bombs and the lurid flight of tracer ammunition. Not one minute did they allow the harassed enemy to rest. British, American and South African pilots made the air hideous with the roaring of their engines as they raked with death each square mile of Von Arnim's last refuge. From that reeking inferno there was no escape for the tortured German and Italian divisions except by air or sea.

FIRST the enemy tried the air. In desperation he called up from Europe fleets of transport planes for an attempt at evacuation. So heavy was our air cover that almost none of the transport planes got through to Italy with their human cargoes. On one day alone 100 of them tried to run the gantlet loaded with the most valuable of the enemy technicians, but out of those 100 huge multiengined planes not one escaped.

Balked of escape by air, the enemy tried by sea, but even a Dunkirk was denied him. In vain there appeared in Tunisian waters the scores of small craft he had assembled for just such an emergency. By torpedo and shellfire the enemy craft were shattered, most of them before they could even reach Tunisian shores from Sicily and Italy. Our foe was indeed brought to bay at last, trapped, ringed in and ripe for the killing, savage beasts in a pen, still fighting savagely.

Then the British First Army struck. It was descended from the British Expeditionary Force which had escaped in dire tribulation through the hell of the Dunkirk evacuation, three years before. For thirty long months in England it had waited for its chance to avenge the Flanders defeats. For six months in Tunisia had it floundered in the mud, sharing with the Americans the dreary task of holding Von Arnim's armies pinned down till the Eighth Army could herd Rommel and his Afrika Korps into the same trap. Now the veterans of Dunkirk drove headlong against the center of the German line.

Thick clouds of aircraft preceded them, blasting a path through the strong German defenses. As Dives groaned for water in hell, so Von Arnim groaned now for his reserves, pinned to the German left flank by the drive of the Eighth Army. Von Arnim was stripped of reserves now, when the center of his line was tottering before the assault of the British First Army. But the trapped beast fights hard. Desperately Von Arnim mustered men from his supply bases, drivers of his supply vehicles, and drove them into the breach. For the moment the German line held.

The Prussian was famous as a master of the art of war, but in the Anglo-American General Staff were minds that outmatched him. General Eisenhower made his next move. As though by magic there appeared on the German right, high up on the map, near the sea, the Second American Corps, those same Americans with whom I had foregathered a few days before on the Faid Pass, far to the southward. They had made a march of 250 miles, in which they had crossed the lines of communication of the British First Army. Now the line of communications of an embattled army is like a busy city street at a rush traffic hour. For one force to cross the life line of another needs superlative traffic organization. That march of the Americans was a great feat, only possible to troops highly disciplined and skilled in war, and one which set the seal of the veteran on the man who could accomplish it.

Defeat followed by victory had transmuted green levies into veteran soldiers, fit for any ordeal. Such a march had been ruled out as impossible by the German staff and their right flank was taken by surprise. It wavered.

Von Arnim's right was now crumbling as his center had broken, and he was totally lacking in reserves to fill the breach. His desperate plight had grown all but hopeless. But Eisenhower was not finished with him yet. As though by sleight-of-hand several of the Eight Army divisions were moved by a terrific night march onto the British First Army front. The enemy had now been completely outgeneraled. His main reserves were on his extreme left, far to the south, pinned down by the supposed presence of an Eighth Army which seemed to have miraculously moved itself overnight to threaten him elsewhere.

Long before Von Arnim could move his reserves back to his threatened center, the British First and Eighth Armies drove into battle together, side by side, smashing home their final irresistible assault. The German center broke. Farther north, too, the Americans pushed home their assault. The German line was now breached in two places. Like flood waters from behind a doubly blasted dam, British and American divisions poured through.

In the north the Americans, with French troops beside them, drove straight for the strong fortress of Bizerte. French engineers had shaken their heads discouragingly at the mere mention of that fortress which they believed to be impregnable, but the Americans burst through its much-vaunted defenses and took it at the first rush.

In the center, the white minarets and palaces of Tunis beckoned the British—Tunis, the city of romance, hard by the plain of ancient Carthage. The Seventh Armored Division of the British Eighth Army, our old friends, the Desert Rats, raced British First Army elements into the streets of the Tunisian capital city while the Fourth Indian Division overran the headquarters of General Von Arnim, capturing the astonished Prussian commander and all his staff. At the same time the New Zealand Division was receiving the surrender of its ancient foes, the German 90th Light Panzers....

The Italian supreme commander, Field Marshal Messe, refused to surrender to any but his ancient foe the Eighth Army, although the troops which had surrounded the Italian remnants were of the British First Army....

HOSTILITIES in Tunisia ceased on May 13, 1943, almost three years after the opening gun of the first Libyan campaign.

In the final last-stand battle some 300,000 picked German and Italian troops had been driven from a series of strongly fortified mountain positions by about two-thirds of their number of British, American and French troops. In addition to the superiority of numbers the enemy had had the advantage of interior lines, the latter only being neutralized by the almost incredible mobility made possible by the high training of British and American troops alike. Tunisia was won by the superior generalship of our leaders and the supreme fighting quality of the men.

Of the 400,000 enemy troops in Tunisia, only a few isolated individuals made good their escape to Italy. About 350,000 surrendered with their vast stores of weapons and ammunition. The remainder lay strewn on the green Tunisian mountain slopes, blind eyes staring at the sun. The total destruction of the enemy in Africa had been accomplished. The fruits of the victory of Alamein had been gathered. The Middle East had been saved. Now the Eighth Army rested in the green hills of Tunisia, poised for a leap across the blue Mediterranean, aimed for the heart of the enemy, the center of his nervous system—Berlin.

Drawn by Herbert Morton Stoops

"Take that carbine by the muzzle and hand it up to me," Tonto ordered.
Blacky said bitterly: "And you said you was slow with a gun!"

APACHE RANGER

A Complete Book-length Novel

by JAY LUCAS

THEY were hours late, and the last sound of carriage- and buggy-wheels had long died down in the street outside, but still the Governor waited. Now he turned quickly in his chair as through the stillness came a faint clink of spurs from the carpeted corridor. He was wondering what this man, once famous, now broken, might look like.

So curious was he that he almost forgot, but he jumped up suddenly and slipped on his long black Prince Albert. It wouldn't do to catch a Governor comfortably in his shirt-sleeves, even in his own study and at this hour of night. He stood waiting, his eyes on the study door.

John Carson was a young man to be Territorial Governor, but he had shrewd eyes above his fine brown beard. That was why, six months ago, the President had sent him out here; for Arizona, new, crude, lawless, had gained ill repute as a refuge for criminals and fugitives; and something had to be done about it.

This thing coming up now— Irregular? Yes, very—if he went through with it after seeing the man. But one advantage of his position's being appointive was that he was responsible only to the President himself. Public opinion here be hanged!

"Come in," he called, in answer to a knock.

The door opened, and first he saw Captain Saunders of the Arizona Rangers, a thin, dark man with a hard face, hard eyes. Saunders was too cold and silent for anyone to like him very much, but he was efficient; he got his job done. He stepped aside to let the man with him enter first.

And this was Tonto Jim! Tall, and rather slender but for his wide shoulders. Quiet, brooding face, deep brown from desert and mountain sun. Saunders said:

"Governor Carson, this is Jim Prescott—Tonto Jim."

"How do you do? Sit down, Tonto."

The Governor motioned him to a chair where the light from the reading-lamp fell on him. Why, the man had blue eyes and brown hair, and he'd have been fair-skinned but for his tan! Little Indian about him but his high cheekbones and the hawklike curve of his thin nose—and at that, the nose could be Scotch. Handsome, in a rugged, masculine way.

"I heard you were an Apache."

"I am—a Tonto. I was reared on the Reservation." He had a low, pleasant voice.

"But you have blue eyes."

"So had my grandfather, Chief Cochise." He added: "That makes it hard to say how much Indian blood I have. Possibly not over an eighth. But whatever my blood may be, I am a member of the Tonto tribe."

So—he felt bitter toward whites, really his own people. *Had* he been given a raw deal, as those very few friends of his kept doggedly insisting? That he had been, Carson was partly convinced, or he would not have sent for him.

"Well, we'll get down to business. Two years ago, you resigned your commission as lieutenant in the Arizona Rangers."

"Yes—upon written request of Governor McDowell."

"Yes—yes. Bluntly, you were strongly suspected of taking a bribe from Wyatt Pierce."

"I was, though I'd never seen him. I demanded a fair trial, but I did not get it. So—I was kicked out and disgraced." The brooding look was very deep now. "But my people, the Tonto Apaches, still believe in me, for I am still a member of the tribe."

"Eh? What do you mean?" Carson looked startled.

"You know no more of Apaches than most whites do. Among us, if a man is found guilty of the least lie, the least dishonorable act, he is driven from the tribe forever, his life forfeit if he is found near it again."

"Well, I'm damned!" grunted the Governor in his surprise. He *did* know little of that fierce people. "I thought your grandfather, Chief Cochise, was an exception, with his astonishingly high code of honor."

"He was an Apache—a Chiricahua."

And, thought the Governor, perhaps the greatest general of the century. He had beaten the whole United States Army, an army a hundred times greater than his, and dictated an armistice on his own terms. Splendid old savage!

GOVERNOR CARSON SAT MUSING, puffing his cigar. Chief Cochise must have looked a great deal like this man sitting before him now. Did Tonto Jim Prescott have his grandfather's high sense of honor? And if so, as one might guess from his appearance, would he ever have—The devil! Looking at the man, he could as soon suspect himself of taking bribes. . . . He'd risk it!

"Go ahead, Saunders. Tell him why we sent for him."

Saunders turned his eyes to Tonto Jim.

"In short, there's one job we've completely failed to handle. We'd like to have you back with us, to try it."

Tonto Jim's face came up suddenly.

"You mean—my commission back?"

"I'm sorry," said the Governor hesitantly—he knew it would be a blow. "We couldn't do that, at first, anyhow. But—well, it might possibly give you a chance to clear your name."

"What is it you'd want me to do?"

Saunders spoke.

"To go into the Palpai country—Wyatt Pierce's country—and try to straighten things out. To let that crew in there know we have a thing called law in Arizona."

Tonto Jim smiled. It was a smile that came slowly.

"And that's all?"

"Yes—a little thing like that." The words were meant for mild humor, but still Saunders' hard features did not change. He took a badge from his pocket, looked at it absently a moment, and dropped it on the table, pushed it aside. "No, you wouldn't want this. If anybody there knew you were with us, you wouldn't last a week. . . . Well?"

Again the brooding look was back on Tonto Jim's face, while he sat with his eyes on the floor, thinking. Suddenly he reached out, took the badge and pinned it on his shirt pocket.

"I'll try it. Worth risking, for a chance to clear myself. But I'm going in openly, with this on."

For the first time Saunders' face showed very slight expression. He looked somewhat upset.

"You can't. It would be suicide."

"Maybe. But I'm going in this way or not at all." It seemed that the former Lieutenant Prescott could be stubborn when he chose.

Saunders shrugged. A short silence, and Tonto stood up and reached for his big battered hat on the table.

"If that's all, I'll be heading for Palpai."

He lost no time! He paused a moment, in respect to the Governor's office, and walked quietly out. No salute to Saunders, of course; salutes, like uniforms, were unknown to the Rangers.

"Damme," grunted the Governor, "but that fellow's all man! I like him." He fixed his shrewd eyes on Saunders. "Could he have been jobbed? And if so, who jobbed him?"

Saunders lit a cigarette. He puffed silently awhile before he answered.

"I've often wondered about that, and if there isn't still possibly a leak somewhere. Pierce seems always a jump ahead of us with his tricks, and we still haven't a thing on him legally. Lately, I've been getting suspicious of the mails, and thinking of stopping using them for messages to my men. Trouble is, I have only fifteen Rangers, and can't spare any of them to carry letters a couple of hundred miles."

"Don't do it! I'll have the postal authorities look into it; nothing better, than to catch a man in a Federal offense. How was Tonto as a Ranger?"

"Best I had. Being raised an Indian, he was a wizard at tracking and all that sort. Nerve too—and brains. He and I were— particularly good friends."

"Oh! I didn't know that."

"Yes, indeed! With the reputation he had, it was a hard blow to the Rangers when that scandal came up."

Still the Governor sat looking shrewdly at Saunders, disconcertingly.

"So I'd heard; the loss of prestige was a blow to all law in Arizona. Saunders," he asked suddenly, "just what chance has he, going in there?"

"Why—none. I mean, of course, with a badge on. He'll be dead inside of a month."

The Governor stood up—it was late. He shook his head. Yes, Arizona was in a mess! He turned to the rear door, and his tone sounded slightly odd as he said:

"Well—good night, Saunders."

Chapter Two

TONTO JIM walked down the exact middle of Palpai's dusty main street—he'd been in town two or three hours. He felt pretty conspicuous out here; it looked too much like flaunting his shiny new badge and the two guns tied low on his thighs, like bragging of being a Ranger now. But he could not risk passing near those windows and doors. Over the low roofs he saw jagged peaks and bluffs—Palpai was far back in the wild mountains.

He heard a voice from some loafers on the sidewalk: "Hup! *Hup!* Left—right—*left!*"

In time with his step. His eyes snapped, but he kept on. He was not used to swallowing jeers and mockery, but he could not afford to get into private quarrels here. Anyhow, what they wanted was to start a row with him, six to one. It showed how they felt around here about a Ranger.

His eyes went to a low building ahead and to his right. It was cheaply built, with a false front to make it look more impressive, but it was about the only thing in Palpai with reasonably fresh paint—dirty white. It had two separate doors leading out to the board sidewalk. Over one was the sign, Palpai Cattlemen's Bank, and on the other, Arizona Stockmen's Detective Agency. There were small branches of the latter elsewhere, but this was headquarters.

"The Agency," as they called it for short, was the heart and center of the things he'd been sent here to see about. That is, Wyatt Pierce was; Pierce, he'd heard, had a private office in the rear, with doors opening into both Agency and bank.

HE SAW A GIRL come out of the bank and stop. She stood turning her head as though not knowing which way to go; she seemed dazed. She was very pretty, with her flaming red hair. A ranch girl; the boots and spurs showed that she had ridden to town.

Her straying eyes fell on Tonto out there—or, it seemed, on his badge. She hesitated, then came straight out to stop him. She spoke in a dull, disheartened tone.

"You're the Arizona Ranger I heard is in here?"

"Yes ma'am. My name's Prescott—Jim Prescott." Tonto raised his hat.

"Prescott—" She seemed trying vaguely to recall something. Suddenly it came to her. "Tonto Jim!"

"Yes ma'am." He reddened. That now was hardly a name to recommend him to a girl of her sort.

She paused uncertainly; perhaps she was trying to reconcile his disgraceful reputation with his quiet manner, with his looks. Suddenly she blurted:

"I don't care who you are, if you're a Ranger again! I need help."

"And you're going to get it," Tonto assured her gently, but with more emphasis, it seemed, than his position called for. He saw faces turning to them, standing out there. "Let's go over to the Chinaman's and have a cup of coffee—some place to talk."

They went in together. Tonto took a seat in the far corner where he could see all in the place and anybody coming in. He hung up his hat but kept his guns on, which was hardly etiquette in Arizona, a girl with him. A young Chinaman brought their coffee. "Well?"

She set her cup down.

"I'm Nell Holt, of the Rafter Bar. My father was shot about six months ago, and crippled. I—reckon it's for life. The doctor said he might have a chance if he'd go to El Paso for an operation, but we have no money for that; there's been too much happening to the ranch. I'm trying to run things myself."

"No range boss?"

"No. I've had three in six months. One was shot—bushwhacked—and nearly died, and the other two were scared out. I just came to town to see about provisions, but neither of the stores will let me have anything on credit. Wyatt Pierce controls them somehow. So I went to the bank to try to borrow a little."

"And he wouldn't lend it to you?" That explained her look coming out of there.

"He would, if I'd agree to pay the Agency two hundred a month to stop the things going on, and hire a man he'd name as range boss. I wouldn't do it!"

"No, you wouldn't. I've heard his 'detectives' and the men causing the trouble around here are the same ones."

"Everybody knows that! But—after all, what can you do? You can't arrest him for asking me to hire his man."

"No," said Tonto slowly. "No, but maybe I can—"

His voice trailed off, and he nodded glumly to himself. He thought he saw now why a man like him had been sent in here. If the main ones couldn't be arrested, maybe Saunders and the Governor expected him to—Whew! He'd got himself into something!

"So," the red-haired girl was saying dully, "I'll go home and tell the boys to roll their beds. Then I'll roll my own and get out. . . . Oh, of course I'll try to drive out what cattle we have left, but I've a feeling we won't get them very far. Something'll happen, a stampede or something."

Tonto thought a moment, then slowly pulled his hand from his trousers pocket, a roll of bills in it.

"Here, Miss Holt—nearly two hundred, I think. That'll get you some stuff to run on." He'd brought it for expenses, but he had a little left to run him till payday.

"But I can't—"

"Take it. It's worth more to me, to get such a chance to tangle with that crowd, and that's what I'm here for. Pay me back if we get things straightened out—and if we don't, I won't need it." He smiled, as though he saw something funny about that last remark.

Still she hesitated.

"Take it! As—as one cattle-man to another."

Strange what the sight of a little money can sometimes do! The girl's eyes brightened, and the color was coming back to her face—she *did* look pretty now, he thought. Hesitantly, she reached for the money.

"Tonto, some cattle-men still say that—that you're all right. I believe it now! I don't know how to thank—"

"Then don't try!" He looked uncomfortable, and hurried back to the business on hand. "But why's Pierce picking on you? Most fellows of that kind leave a girl alone—they've lots of others to operate on."

"He's—asked me to marry him, several times; and I wouldn't."

"Oh—*that's* it!"

She caught a change in his quiet drawl and looked at him. Tonto's lips were thin, and his eyes glinted.

"You did right in coming to me! I'm going over and have a talk with this Wyatt Pierce."

"Tonto! Don't! Don't go over there while you're angry—you'll get in trouble!"

He laughed genially—too genially.

"Trouble! What do you suppose I was sent in here hunting? I'll see you later."

He walked down the restaurant with his spurs jingling. She saw him pause by the door to pay the old Chinaman for their coffee. He went out, and she could see him cross the street and enter the bank.

"Wyatt Pierce in?" he asked.

The pale young man behind the grille looked up at him through his glasses. A lunger—some Eastern bank-clerk out here for his health, whom Pierce had picked up as knowing banking procedure.

"Mr. Pierce is in his office. Somebody with him just now; won't you have a seat?"

A MINUTE OR SO OF WAITING, and it began to dawn on Tonto Jim that he was fortunate in not having been able to go right in—he was cooling off. No less determined, but cooling off. If he'd rushed in there angry, he'd probably have done the wrong thing.

He began looking around; he'd hardly noticed the place at first. This bank consisted of one fairly small room. Bronze paint over wood took the place of the usual metal fixtures, and the furniture had a homemade appearance. Still, as a small Arizona bank, it did very well.

He was beginning to wonder now why he had got so almighty steamed up over that girl being picked on. Of course anyone would get hot over a thing like that, but just the same— Wyatt Pierce, the man from whom he'd been accused of taking a bribe. He'd see him soon for the first time. Yes, he'd been getting quite a "rep" as a Ranger; had Pierce, afraid of him, engineered—

"Mr. Pierce will see you now."

Nobody had come out of the office. That's right—he'd forgotten about the other door he'd heard of, through the Agency. And there had been a faint tinkle of a bell. This Pierce man seemed to put on a lot of dog for a small-town banker, with his private office, and bells!

Crossing to the door, Tonto suddenly lagged a step. His wait, and the bell—had Wyatt Pierce been making some special preparations for the Ranger's call? He turned the knob and went in.

"How d'you do, Mr. Prescott. Have a chair."

Pierce was standing, courteously pushing a chair forward beside the desk. He was tall and thin, in a long, well-fitting black coat, like the Governor's—that sort of coat was often favored in Arizona by men who thought themselves too good to have their guns out in sight like common folks.

They sat down, and for a moment or two inspected each other silently. Both well knew this was no casual meeting; it might be very far from it.

PIERCE WAS HANDSOME, in a cruel way, with his neat little black mustache. But for a few gray hairs at his temples, he looked young. Tonto placed him as a man of good education who had gone to the bad.

"Cigar, Mr. Prescott?" He pushed a box across the desk.

"No, thanks—I'll roll one." Tonto did, and immediately came down to business: "Mr. Pierce, would you mind if I, as an Arizona Ranger, ask you some questions about your Agency?"

"Not at all—glad to tell you. I organized it to protect my banking and other interests. This, as you probably know, is deplorably lawless country around here."

"And you use the Agency to 'protect' others?"

Tonto allowed himself a slight sarcastic smile, and was met by one not very different. It seemed that Pierce didn't intend to try fooling him; he was only careful not to say anything that might turn up later as evidence.

"Yes, I do. Of course, they help share the expenses of the thing."

"Pretty heavy expenses, I hear, for the others!" commented Tonto dryly.

"Quite heavy—yes. But they prefer paying them to—what might happen otherwise."

Tonto thought a moment, nodded.

"It's a nice game you have! And pretty safe; hard to prove anything on you." He spoke calmly.

Pierce laughed, showing his white, even teeth.

"You must think me a crook!"

"I do. Just about king-pin of all the crooks in Arizona."

With the clipper on the end of his thick gold watch-chain, Pierce carefully removed the end of a cigar. He lit the cigar, waved the match out and placed it slowly in the ash-tray. He was still smiling, but seemed to be thinking fast. He got down, genially, to first names.

"Well, Tonto, I'm head of a very profitable business venture, though some sanctified souls might not approve of all phases of it. And if you'll pardon my returning the word, you yourself have the name of being one of the leading crooks in Arizona."

"I've been called even worse."

Tonto smiled quietly back at him. Yes, it was a darned good thing he hadn't come straight in here!

Pierce misunderstood the smile, and the calm way Tonto met his eyes.

"So you're here for a—share. I'd wondered about it when I heard you were in town, and I'd been debating

with myself whether, if that was what you wanted, I should pay off or—handle you otherwise." No need to guess what the "otherwise" was. "I find you far more intelligent than I had expected. Perhaps we might—"

His hand on the desk, he held the cigar in his long white fingers, looking at the ash, while he reached a last-minute decision. Tonto waited.

"All right! How about this: I'd like to have you as chief of my Agency. Deuce Willett, the present incumbent, is pretty stupid—to put it mildly. Five hundred a month, and commissions. I'd guarantee you a thousand a month to begin; I think you'd be worth it."

Offered Pierce's pay! The very thing he had been broken, disgraced, for supposedly doing, two years ago! Tonto's face never changed; Indian rearing was an advantage sometimes.

"Whew! That's money! Trouble is," he said sadly, "right now I happen to have this rangering job."

Pierce frowned. He looked pained by such dull wits; he hadn't expected them in Tonto Jim.

"That's the point! You'd keep that job, and nobody would know about your private arrangement with me. As Ranger in charge of this district, you could be very useful—information for me, on various things. Well?"

He sat back, puffing his cigar patronizingly, waiting for an affirmative answer.

Tonto said calmly:

"Wyatt, I know where that sort of thing always gets a man: shot, hanged, or in jail for life. You're headed for one of the three, and don't know it. But that's far from my reason for giving you my answer—*no!*"

"Think it over, Tonto!"—quietly. "You don't realize my influence in Arizona. I might even be able to get you your lieutenant's commission back."

And that would mean swaying the Governor himself, who was officially head of the Rangers.

"No!"

Pierce sneered. "Scared?"

Tonto laughed, and touched his badge.

"Would I be here with this on if I was very scary? Fact is, Wyatt, I came in here to break up your playhouse, and I'm going to do it. Just thought I'd drop in and tell you about it before I set to work."

Pierce's very black eyes snapped; he seemed to have a vicious temper and to be trying to control it, to match Tonto's casual manner. Too bad he hadn't had Tonto's Indian training in hiding feelings! Tonto went on, with a hard look straight into Pierce's eyes:

"Something else, Wyatt: lay off the Rafter Bar, and start doing it right now! Miss Holt is not going out of business yet. I've lent her money to run on."

He didn't say that it was less than two hundred dollars, which wouldn't keep her going long, paying and feeding cowboys.

"You've— *Why!*"

Pierce went gray with rage, and his white teeth showed. The man had a vicious temper, all right! But he still kept self-control enough to hold his voice down; it was low, deadly.

"Tonto, you know what you're asking for?"

No use talking any more. Tonto had come in here mainly to warn Pierce to leave the Rafter Bar alone, and he'd done that. He got up and put on his hat.

"I know! And I was wondering if the safest thing for me wouldn't be to shoot you right now, Wyatt, and try to prove later why I did it."

Of course he wouldn't. One could never guess from his quiet tone and face that he was boiling angry. This dog Pierce, persecuting a girl like Nell Holt!

"Go ahead!" mocked Pierce. "Draw, why don't you?"

But Tonto had heard a sound behind him. He turned. In the door by which he had entered stood a man, and there were two in the other, the one which must lead to the Agency. All three had their eyes on him, though none of them had pulled a gun. A more evil-looking trio would be hard to find. Was this a sample of Pierce's detectives? Pierce spoke harshly.

"Well, why don't you draw!"

Tonto shrugged. "Looks like my mistake! . . . Those bell things—button under your desk?"

He was trying to watch all three—which left Pierce, the most dangerous of the lot, behind him. Would Pierce, he wondered, shoot him in the back? It would be safe enough, with three witnesses to swear he'd done it in self-defense. No—to stop a bank-robbery; that would be a better story, and Tonto Jim's poor reputation would make it sound plausible to a jury.

Whatever Tonto felt, he managed not to show it. He looked even pleasant as he turned back—not sure if he'd get all the way around. He made himself smile a little.

"Your say, Wyatt!"

A short silence. Pierce's very black eyes were boring into Tonto's face, searching for a sign of fear; he couldn't find it.

"Well, say it, whatever it is! If you're not going to order me shot, I have to go see somebody."

"Who?"

Tonto tipped back his head and looked at him with half-closed eyes.

"Miss Holt."

Why, he was deviling the man! Pierce, his lips working, suddenly half rose from his chair and banged the desk with his fist.

"Get out! But listen! You'll be pretty safe in Palpai—*pretty* safe!—till seven o'clock. If you're here between then and sundown, something is likely to happen to you. The sun won't set on you in this town!"

So he didn't want him killed in his office! Outsiders might be coming in investigating things, and that would be slightly uncomfortable.

"I'm staying in Palpai, Wyatt!"

"Oh-h, you are! You know what that means?"

"Sure! You think you're going to have me killed between seven and sundown. Well, *hasta la visto,* Señor Wyatt. Nice little chat we had."

The cool way he turned was maddening—and he was mad to do it, to taunt Pierce. The man in the bank doorway moved reluctantly to let him pass through. He nodded to the pale-faced clerk and went out to the street.

"Tonto, my Indian friend," he told himself soberly, "you have *no* sense when you get mad!"

Chapter Three

TONTO was in his room at the shabby so-called hotel. He had just finished disassembling his two six-shooters to clean, oil and inspect every part. A single grain of sand, hanging somewhere, could cost him his life.

He had been so absorbed in the work that when he glanced at his big silver watch he was surprised to find it almost half-past six. He jumped up, thrust the guns into the holsters, and put on his hat. He hadn't seen Nell Holt since his talk with Pierce; he hadn't wanted to go ramming around the streets looking for her until he'd done this job on his guns. And he didn't want her to be around him after seven; it might be no place for a lady, so to speak.

Out on the sidewalk, he caught sight of her almost immediately. She was half a block off, and evidently looking for him, for she came hurrying to meet him. Her face showed relief.

"I couldn't find you. I was afraid—"

"I'm all right. Let's go to the restaurant and eat."

They could, he thought, be through by seven. They took the same corner table as before.

"Well?" she asked, her eyes on him anxiously.

"I saw Wyatt Pierce. I'm to be shot between seven and sundown."

He meant it in grim humor, but she looked scared, her eyes big.

"But you will be, if he said so!"

Tonto sniffed. "Huh! You people around here think Pierce is God Almighty and can do anything."

"He's more like the devil!"

"That's right!" Tonto's eyes crinkled. "Now that you mention it, he does look like the devil, as I've seen him in some pictures—dark, handsome gent."

She reached suddenly across the table and laid her hand on his.

"Tonto, won't you do something for me?"

"No. You're going to ask me to leave town."

"Why won't you?" she persisted.

He told of his midnight interview with the Governor. When he got through, she sat with a sick look on her face. She wouldn't venture to advise him in a thing like that. It might be better for a man like him to risk dying here honorably than to have that unjustified stench attached to his name the rest of his life.

Tonto glanced down at the dinner just set before them. "Say, this doesn't look bad, does it?"

It did; it was pretty sloppy and greasy. But for two years now he'd had no change from the monotonous food of a Tonto camp, and he dug in with relish. Nearly through, he glanced over at her anxiously.

"Why, you're eating no more than a kitten!"

"I had a very late lunch," she lied.

How *could* he eat at such a time! Men always talked of not understanding women: well, she'd like to see the girl could understand men—men like Tonto Jim. He seemed not to know that the hands of the old clock on the wall had just crept past seven.

But it was soon brought to him. He saw the thin, long-faced young man as soon as he entered. He noticed him glance quickly around until his eyes fell on that corner back there. Here he came, between tables now mostly full. He stopped, facing them.

"Howdy, Tonto. Reckon as how you don't know me."

"No."

"Well, you two-bit tinhorn bribe-taker, you knew my kid brother all right—Bud Willett, that you killed in Tombstone."

He spoke loudly enough to be heard by everyone in the place; he wanted to be heard. Tonto saw that his anger was feigned, but from the scared looks turned suddenly toward this corner, nobody else did. Probably Deuce never had a brother. Likely Pierce had coached him in this whole yarn, to keep his own name out of the thing. Tonto's face reddened slightly.

"Oh—you're Deuce Willett! See here, Deuce: I never saw your brother; I never heard of him."

"The hell you didn't! Then why did you run an' hide out in the hills when I went down lookin' for you?"

What *could* a fellow say to such pure fabrication as this? Tonto's face hardened.

"That's enough of it, Deuce—I understand! I'll meet you outside in a few minutes, or anywhere you say."

"The hell you will! I'm not givin' you another chance to run. We're settling it right now."

From the corner of his eye, Tonto saw the last customer just ducking out the restaurant door. Tonto looked nervous—how was Deuce to know that it was for the girl's sake? If shooting began in this corner, with Nell Holt almost between them— He couldn't let it begin!

"Deuce! For God's sake don't start anything here, with a girl— I'll see you later."

As if to show how completely he refused to fight now, he picked up his coffee cup and began to sip—his hand shook a little. But he kept his eyes on Deuce Willett over the rim of his cup. His tone had been so anxious that Deuce did hesitate. But he'd had his orders. He burst out:

"All right, damn you! Here it is!"

The right hands of both moved at once. Deuce's darted to his gun. And Tonto, with a sudden motion, dashed the coffee in his face.

There was a wild moment or two in that corner. Tonto's chair fell backward as he came to his feet and leaped. Deuce fired, trying frantically to blink his eyes open enough to see him—fired, and missed.

In panic, Tonto heard the bullet thud into something close behind. He heard a sharp, strangling scream from the girl, but he could not turn—Deuce was almost ready to shoot again.

Tonto struck, and he put his big shoulder behind it. Deuce crashed to the floor, and Tonto jumped in and kicked one gun from near his hand, the other out of the holster. He wheeled quickly, hardly daring to look.

Thank God! There sat Nell Holt, her mouth queerly half open, staring at a broken plate before her on the table. Tonto turned back, his eyes blazing.

"You dirty—uh—uh—" He could hardly choke down the words that came to him. "Get up!"

Deuce did, slowly, a wild look on his long face. Tonto took him by the shoulder and shook him.

"I should kill you—by hand! Do you know that you came near shooting this girl?"

"To hell with her!" snarled Deuce.

The flat of Tonto's hand lashed against his cheek so hard as to send him staggering sidewise.

No red came where Deuce had been struck; his cheeks were an ashy gray with rage, and his bleached-looking gray eyes were murderous—they never left Tonto's face.

Tonto picked up the two guns, rammed the cartridges out, and thrust them toward him.

"Here! I'll let you have your own six-shooters you're used to, in case you want to hunt me up later on. Now get out, quick!"

Deuce did get out, but not quickly. In bravado, he took his own time in turning and starting down the long floor. At the door, he stopped, turned deliberately.

"We'll settle this later this evenin', Tonto. It's on sight!"

Tonto turned quickly to Nell Holt.

"You'd better saddle up and be getting out to the ranch. I'm afraid there's going to be trouble aroun.. here."

He was surprised at how quickly she looked at him. She was a ranch girl and had plenty of nerve—if she hadn't, she wouldn't have defied Wyatt Pierce.

"Think I could leave before—sundown?"

"No," he admitted. She'd have to see how this thing came out. "Well, anyhow, we'd better be separating, the way things look."

She made one last attempt.

"Tonto, *won't* you leave town?"

"No. I wasn't sent here to be run out the first day. I may be leaving in a hurry later on, while things cool off a bit. Would it be all right with you if I come out to the ranch, some time during the night?"

Her eyes, level, met his, and she held out her hand.

"Tonto, anything you do is all right with me. I'll be expecting you."

Why, he thought, she didn't despise him—she wouldn't look at him that way if she did. She—maybe—even liked him, Tonto Jim or not. He stood watching her back as she went down the long floor, and out. He was coming to believe that this Nell Holt red-head was a great girl. This fight with Pierce he was in would be well worth while to help her out, if for no other reason.

He paused a moment, thinking fast. He felt quite sure that after what had happened, Deuce Willett would

have no hankering to meet him openly again. He might be lying inside some window across from the restaurant, with a carbine—he very probably was.

Fair enough—or so it seemed. On sight meant on sight, and in Arizona Territory, according to the rules accepted, one could now shoot the other in the back if he saw him first. But Deuce knew the town, and all in it were his friends—from policy, at least. He'd have a hundred concealed places to fire from, with Tonto out in the street to be shot down like a rabbit.

There *must* be some way to bring Deuce out in the open—some taunt, something. And he had to find it, or he wouldn't have a show; none whatever. But nothing would come to him.

WELL, WHILE HE WAS THINKING about that, he'd have to be going ahead with his plans for getting away, in case he came out all right in the shooting. He hurried through the kitchen, through an alley, and straight to the livery, where he saddled his horse. This horse, Zeeb, was one of those oddly marked throw-backs to the wild horses of Asia sometimes found in the West—a zebra dun, with black-barred legs and lined back. He had their usual rawhide toughness, but unlike most of them he was large and powerful.

Tonto had noticed a steep, rough trail leading up a gulch, and at different times he had seen Navajos following it. A casual question had got him the information that they had a small camp up on the mesa. He wanted to see them now.

He had decided to try to rent a fast short-distance horse from them—they'd have one; Navajos loved horse-racing. He could push it to its limit up the steep trail; and then, with the mounts of any pursuers completely winded from the climb, find his own sturdy dun ready on top. Then, on Zeeb, he could laugh at pursuit, and return when he was ready for the next blow at Pierce's organization.

Queer, he thought, that he should have a Ranger's badge on his chest again, and once more be planning the old tricks that had made Arizona's lawless ones fear him. Yes, he knew they had feared him—and so got him broken.

He mounted and rode unobtrusively as possible up a side street. He passed the last rickety Mexican shacks and came to the foot of the steep trail. He started up, his mind back again on a way to get Deuce Willett in the open.

Before he had gone six yards, a man stepped suddenly from behind a piñon, a carbine to his shoulder.

"Not leavin' town, are you, Tonto?" he asked.

Tonto started very slightly. At first his expression hardly changed, and then he forced his slow grin.

"Why, no—I only thought I was."

Tonto quickly sized the man up. He was pretty much of Deuce's type, slim, but slightly shorter and with very black hair and eyebrows. And he certainly was a more tough-looking customer. Where Deuce's face showed a good deal of reckless nerve, this man's held little but treachery and a sort of cowardly cunning. Tonto had seen him on the street that day and recognized him—Blacky Dowlan, badly wanted down south for numerous rustlings and horse-thefts.

Blacky spoke again. He had an oddly weak voice.

"I got orders to shoot you, Tonto."

"Well, why don't you?"

Tonto looked straight into his dark eyes, and in them found an expression he could not at all make out. Certainly it was not the look of a man ready to kill another. The fellow seemed to be weighing something rapidly—and of course it would be something tricky. He asked a question that seemed pointless at this time.

"Tonto, how quick are you with a gun?"

"Why—pretty slow, I'm afraid," confessed Tonto. "I've practiced a lot, but I reckon I'm—well, sort of clumsy."

Watching keenly, he thought the man looked slightly crestfallen. Queer! Why should he be?

A light flashed suddenly on Tonto—at least a very good guess came.

"Where," he asked, "do you stand in your crowd?"

Blacky eyed him sharply.

"Right next to Deuce Willett."

"Oh—that's it! So if something or other happened to Deuce, you'd likely get his job. Thousand a month, I hear. That's good money!"

"Listen!" spat Blacky angrily. "Me an' Deuce are pals—*compadres.*"

"Thank God I'm not your *compadre!*" Tonto remarked. It would be far safer to be his enemy. This man reminded him of a toad, or a snake, or something that way.

Blacky glared at him.

"I'll plug—"

"Oh, no, you won't! Even if I am sort of slow with a gun, I *might* get in a lucky shot and kill Deuce. Or we might kill each other. You lose nothing by risking it—I won't say a word about being up here or seeing you."

He knew he should speak more tactfully, but the man gave him such a feeling of revulsion that he could not. It was just as well that Tonto had come in here openly, wearing a badge; he had too blunt a nature to do the thing otherwise.

Now that any danger of shooting seemed past, Blacky lowered his carbine, but he still held it in both hands, ready to flip up. He spoke in an aggrieved, misunderstood tone.

"You got me all wrong! It's only that—well, I don't want to shoot nobody; I aint that kind. I'll let you go back to town, Tonto. An' don't try to git out no other way; every trail is watched, an' the next feller would plug you shore, before you saw him."

"Thanks for being so plumb kindhearted, Blacky," said Tonto. "I know you'd sure feel bad about it if I happened to get your pal Deuce. Well, glad I met you!"

He picked up his reins and began to turn Zeeb. Blacky Dowlan lowered his carbine to one hand. That was what Tonto had been waiting for. Before Blacky knew what was happening, he was looking into a Colt.

The yellow in him showed up instantly. He dropped the carbine as if it were red-hot and raised his arms.

"Hell of a way to do me, after I'd—"

Tonto cut him short..

"Take that carbine by the muzzle and hand it up to me. . . Now get your gun-belt off with your left hand, and pass it up."

With venomous eyes, Blacky did. He said bitterly:

"And you said you was slow with a gun!" He'd never heard of such a dirty trick. Nervously, he added: "Deuce'll give me hell for this!"

"I'll help you out there—to be kindhearted like you. Tell Deuce I sneaked up through the bushes there and threw a gun on you before you knew I was around." Tonto's eyes crinkled humorously. "Remind him that I'm a Tonto Apache—he knows what *they* are! I'll stick with you on the story, if it comes up."

THIS WAS A PIECE OF SUBTERFUGE almost worthy of Blacky's own devious nature—but Blacky would not see through it, and would tell the yarn as likely to get him into less trouble than the truth. What Tonto really wanted was to avoid any remarks about a quick draw, to put Deuce on his guard.

"And be sure to tell him that I said I'm going to be back, and right out on the main street, before sundown."

"The hell you will!"

Blacky's sneer showed how very far he was from believing it. Why should Tonto go to all this bother to get away, if he meant to come back? It didn't make sense.

That was just exactly how Tonto wanted him—and Deuce—to look at it. The yarn would spread that Tonto Jim had bragged that he'd be on the street at sundown, and everybody would be watching. And Deuce Willett, feeling quite sure that he would not, would be parading up and down with his guns on, looking very heroic for the benefit of all the eyes on him, as he waited to shoot it out bravely with the Ranger.

There was the trick Tonto had wanted, to get Deuce out in the open! And it should work. Something funny about making this treacherous, sneaking Blacky the unwitting tool of it all; far, far better than taking him into his confidence and risking an almost certain double-cross. And he'd tell the story convincingly, believing it himself.

Chapter Four

IT is difficult for a man to feel exactly happy when he has a shooting-scrape coming up with a first-class professional; but Tonto was thinking, as he kept on up the trail, how very fortunate it was that Blacky had stopped him; it did not occur to him that nothing but his own quick wits had turned a calamity completely to his own advantage.

Topping out on the mesa, his searching eyes found three hogans not far off—little huts of upright juniper poles and mud. He rode straight to the middle of the Navajo camp and stopped. He sat there, he and his dun almost as motionless as an equestrian statue; splendid Indian etiquette.

The Indians ignored him completely, all but two or three who cast open glances of hatred his way; they looked as if they'd love to cut his throat, and might do it, at that. A Navajo takes no pains to hide his feelings toward whites.

In fact, while pretending not to notice him, they began a discussion, every word of which he understood. With Blacky's revolver, which he was still carrying, he had three good six-shooters with full cartridge belts, and two Winchesters; things worth, according to their estimation, taking some risk to obtain. They couldn't be identified like a stolen horse, and what firearms and ammunition they bought illegally was almost junk, at scandalous prices.

Only Tonto's eyes moved, slowly, as he took in the camp. There were seven or eight long-haired bucks in dirty bright-colored velvet tunics; they were heavily loaded with bracelets and belts of turquoise-studded silver. The gaudy, voluminous skirts of the squaws, reaching draggle-tailed to their moccasins, could not conceal their graceful figures—the Navajo is usually good-looking.

That discussion among the bucks was getting hot. They had now decided to invite him to get down, and one of them could steal up behind him and hit him on the head with an ax—they didn't want a shot heard down in the little town, since theoretically a Reservation Indian couldn't possess firearms at all.

Tonto figured he had waited as long as was prudent. He spoke with slow dignity.

"How fare my brothers, the Navajos?"

His stern, impassive features did not show it, but he wanted to let out a whoop of mirth, for the hardly noticeable change in their dark faces meant, to him, blank and utter astonishment. He had spoken Apache, without a trace of accent; he had understood all they said!

They had good reason to be surprised. They had never heard of a white's speaking an Indian tongue well.

They tried to pass it off as dignity, but he knew that they *couldn't* speak for a moment. At last one asked:

"How does the white man know our tongue?"

He introduced himself gravely in the ceremonious Apache manner.

"I am he who is called Lannabi, of the Black Rock clan, of the Tonto tribe of the Apache people."

A Tonto! That explained it. Those fierce wild-riding eagles of the mountains had always lost many in battle and raid—and slender, wiry squaws who can ride a hundred miles in a day, dog-trot almost as far, do not bear many offspring. So the Tontos had always to replenish their stock by stealing children, and these for three hundred years had included a few Spaniards and Americans. A Tonto, sometimes, might look like anything.

A young man who had been squatting by the fire rose and strode to him through the others, who made way—this showed him a chief of some sort. He was of a common Navajo type; tall and very thin, with evil eyes and a sort of devilish good looks.

There is no more formal etiquette than that of Indian greeting. The words, gravely spoken, should have been: "Our Tonto brother is welcome at the camp-fires of the Navajo." Instead, the young chief began to laugh, straight up in Tonto's face. Tonto flushed angrily. This was the worst insult that could be offered to him, a stranger. So they still wanted these guns and cartridges and, their first plan having failed, they would pick a brawl with him.

Fresh trouble! It looked as though this Palpai country held nothing else for him. He, a Tonto, should have known better than to have any dealings with Navajos. But showing the white feather now would only bring this wolf-pack down upon him. He'd have to bluff, defy them. He sneered brazenly down at the young chief.

"A certain man has no manners! He should go to the Tontos to learn them—or perhaps I shall have to teach him."

He was ready. This should be the signal for the fight—he wanted it over if it had to be. But the tall, thin young chief only laughed the harder; he seemed really amused about something.

"*Huh-h-h!* So the Tonto stranger will eat all of us!"

There was something in his tone, in his manner, that made Tonto peer hard into his face. And suddenly he straightened in his saddle.

"Simon Hawk!"

He'd sat on the same school bench with him! He remembered him as a slim, dark-faced young devil who had knifed a placid Hualpai boy and, waving his bloody knife, dived screaming through a closed window into the night—the last seen of him.

Well, Simon certainly had done a fine job of going back to the tribe! His long, dirty raven-black hair was twisted in a knot at the back of his neck and bound with a soiled woolen cord. His purple velvet jacket was far from being the cleanest here, and he fairly jangled with silver ornaments.

Tonto said in English: "How are you, Simon?"

The young chief sniffed contemptuously.

"Speak Apache—and call me Cosayee! Dismount, my brother. My hogan and all in it are yours."

OF COURSE, THIS "BROTHER" stuff meant little—mere formality. But he sounded as though he might mean part, at least, of the last.

Tonto was thinking fast. He had been the only pupil in the school with whom this haughty and treacherous Navajo would pretend the least friendship—perhaps because he was the only one not afraid of him. If any of that friendship remained, and the man's manner hinted that it did, he would find the Navajos invaluable to him in the job he had to do here; hardly a leaf could blow over in the countryside that they would not know of it. They could be of help right now, this evening!

Tonto swung slowly from his horse.

"Cosayee, my brother, let us sit by your camp-fire and talk. There is a trick I wish to discuss."

When at last Tonto rose to go, the sun was hardly twenty minutes high. He mounted, not his own horse, but a heavy-set, rather small pinto which Cosayee had lent him; he told Tonto it was a racer, a quarter-horse. It had the looks of one, the quick but smooth movements; and it struck off in a swinging trot, lifting its hoofs high. The Navajos watched his big hat disappear below the rim of the mesa.

"Of course," one of them remarked casually, "Long-face will kill him. Long-face is very fast with a gun."

Cosayee spoke judiciously.

"*Nn-nn-nn,* I don't know. That one was always well able to take care of himself. I have gambled a good pony that he will return, for if he does not, the fish-bellies will keep my pinto."

Another turned to him quickly.

"Five more ponies that Long-face kills him!"

"Hoos-na, the bet is taken."

Others hurried with offers, and before Cosayee knew it, he had wagered forty-two ponies—his whole herd. To lose, would ruin him. But the Navajo is by nature a hopeless gambler who will literally bet his moccasins and go barefooted. Tonto had better win—and he'd have a friend in Cosayee for life, or at least for some time.

His last pony wagered, a short silence came. Not one except Cosayee had thought Tonto worth risking his cheapest silver ring on, and he was beginning to feel pretty dubious about it now. But a young squaw stepped into the group.

"I have three ponies, Hoos-na, and they all say the Tonto wins."

Hoos-na tipped his head back and sidewise, and looked at her quizzically. She was graceful as a she-panther; her reddish-brown skin was smooth as silk, and a wild fire glowed in her dark eyes. Hoos-na spoke.

"And Nahli, you also have two eyes—and not once did they leave the Tonto's face. I did not see hatred in them!"

Her bright-copper cheeks flushed, and she whirled on him.

"Hoos-na will mind his own business! Does he know that our visitor was he whom whites call Tonto Jim, who was formerly a chief of the Rangers? Does he know that he is a grandson of the great Chief Cochise? Who, Hoos-na, is Hoos-na? What has *he* ever done?"

A laugh followed.

But Takkaä, a dark look on his face, stepped in and confronted her. Takkaä was Cosayee's cousin, and almost enough like him to be his twin; he was somewhat wider in the shoulders, better built, but he had the same evil eyes.

"Nahli, a modest squaw keeps her glances from strangers. So, now, I tell you to do!"

SHE PROUDLY TOSSED her gleaming black hair, like a wild horse tossing its mane.

"And a fat Supai squaw will obey the man who commands her—but not this girl of the Navajo tribe!"

"I am to marry you!" thundered Takkaä.

"*Huh-h-h!* So the man is to marry me!" And she broke into a peal of musical laughter right in his face, her white teeth flashing.

But now the gnarled old medicine-man came hurrying forward.

"Girl, go to your hogan! Your untamed ways bring great sorrow to my old heart. *Ayee-ee-ee*—that I should ever have been father to such a one!"

"My father, Nahli is obedient."

She spoke in sweet, innocent tones, and with meek air and bowed head she turned away. But there was mockery, even for old Nnuk-kaa himself, in her deerlike brown eyes. At the hogan entrance, she paused, and turned deliberately to smile toward the rim, where that big hat had disappeared. Nnuk-kaa shook his tangled gray hair.

"What are maidens coming to! Pay no attention to her, Takkaä; she is only trying to tease you, to make you jealous."

Takkaä had offered her father many ponies for her, almost all he had; and in these irreverent days the best shaman had a hard time to live as a shaman should; this one was very poor.

Takkaä's wicked eyes rested a long time on that hole in the hogan where she had gone. They went slowly to the head of the rim trail. He spoke, half to himself.

"Perhaps I shall kill her yet. Or perhaps I shall kill the other one."

From the tense silence around, the rest believed he might do either—or both. They knew Takkaä.

CHAPTER FIVE

TURNING in between those first Mexican shacks, Tonto glanced at the sun; it was just touching the piñons on a high ridge. A few moments, and it would be out of sight—sundown, maybe not according to the almanac, but sundown as far as Palpai was concerned. He did not deceive himself: it might also be sundown for him. It had to be, for either him or Deuce Willett.

Oddly, he found that about his only feeling toward Deuce now was respect. Speed of draw in practice wasn't all of it; it took—nerve to keep one's head in the real thing and make the same smooth draw. Willett, whatever his faults, would stand up and shoot it out with a man; he'd tried to once, with him.

Could he keep relaxed when the thing came up? The least stiffening of his muscles would slow him, and might even make him miss if he did get to fire.

His eyes, trained among the Apaches, were searching everywhere. Somebody might take a shot at him before he even found Deuce. He saw a man ahead—on the corner of the main street—wave his hand to someone and then go hurrying off. A signal that he, Tonto, was coming.

Better not risk his pony out on that main street; if they shot it, he'd be sunk. He tied it around the corner. He'd have to remember to mount on the right-hand side, or the pinto would go to bucking and slow him up. He'd learned to ride on Indian-broke horses, but he'd been mounting from the left during his Ranger years. So many things to think of! He stood there by the pony and rolled a cigarette. He scratched a match on the hitching rack and lit it.

Well, here goes! He walked the three or four steps to the corner. . . .

There was Deuce Willett—out in the middle of the street in the next block, with two or three men hurrying from him to the shelter of the nearest houses. And not another soul in sight. How many eyes were watching from windows, from cracks of doors? The Ranger was here; he'd refused to be run out of town.

Well, he'd got Deuce out in the open, and if that was an even break, he had it. He too walked to the center of the street, and stopped there. He was not looking for this trouble. If it came to him—

Here came Deuce, slowly, deliberately, he too smoking a cigarette. Deuce half turned, waved his hand to someone inside a window, said something—and laughed. In the dead stillness of the town, Tonto could plainly hear the laugh even at this distance, though he could not catch the words. Yes, Deuce Willett had courage, when he had to show it.

Tonto stood there. He measured the street with his eye. The little hotel he stayed at was away down behind Deuce, and the only other building he knew was the restaurant where he and Nell had eaten. He should be near that when the thing ended, in case the pack came

and he had to run. . . . Now it was about halfway between them.

Slowly too, Tonto started walking toward the other man. He heard a sound at a window he was passing; a low, hysterical scream from a woman. There was a man's deeper tones, trying to soothe her; he was dragging her away from the window. Why had the fool woman insisted on watching, if she couldn't stand it? But why had Deuce insisted on this thing? Pierce's orders, of course—Pierce's money. No Ranger was wanted in Palpai: one could not be let live there.

And then, from another window:

"Tonto! Good luck to you!"

A strangling, agonized voice, but still brave, encouraging him. Nell Holt. He knew she'd be white as paper, her eyes big and strained as they followed him.

"Thanks, Nell," he said, without turning his face.

He felt his shoulders straighten. Why, sure he had a chance! He had an even chance. He felt himself relaxing; he hadn't even known that he was tense. Queer what those three or four words had done—somebody for him: one friend in this hostile town.

Nell was a great girl! . . . If he got killed, her outfit was gone. . . . Queer; if he came out all right, it would be Nell who won, not himself; she'd made him loosen up when he was tense. . . . Arizona Ranger again now . . . . Rangers had a tough job!

He came opposite the restaurant, and Deuce Willett was not far off, walking slowly, right out in the middle of the lonesome street. Pistol range now; it would be happening any second. Damn it, stay loose—*stay loose!*

She said to him: "Good luck to you!" . . . Couldn't let Nell down! . . . Oh, hell! Why hadn't he stayed on the Reservation? Not scared, but—damn' queer feeling!

A sudden sharp tinkle of glass. His eyes darted sidewise and saw a carbine barrel come through a window three houses down. Fine! If he got Deuce, somebody else would drop him—both of them dead. Fine thought to help him relax! His eyes flicked back to Deuce; they'd been gone but a moment.

Too late! Deuce's gun was half out already. Tonto threw himself sidewise to the dust, but before he struck it, he knew he was hit. Had Deuce really got him?

He was lying there, head-on to Deuce, firing with his left hand; he'd lost his right-hand gun somehow. Missed—dust six inches to one side of Deuce. Head-on, nothing! He'd just caught one in his leg. Aim, dammit, aim!

Quick on that trigger—he's flipping his gun to shoot again, and you haven't scratched him! Press it; don't jerk. *There!*

It was all over. Deuce Willett was lying down there, huddled up like he might be asleep, a gun still in his hand.

But the fellow with the carbine—at the window! Tonto came quickly to his feet, white dust all over the front of his clothes. He took a quick glance down at himself. Bullet through his right forearm; blood running down inside his left leg—leg not broken, or he could not stand. Plenty bloody! And get off the street, quick!

He stopped to grab up his second gun, and that almost cost him his life. As he leaped through the restaurant door, a bullet whacked into the jamb; it couldn't have missed him by six inches. Loud gun—no Winchester carbine. Or—that was it; two Winchesters, firing almost together. Why, that thing with Deuce was only the beginning of it: it wasn't Deuce, it was Wyatt Pierce he was up against, Wyatt and all his crew.

Tonto left a trail of blood-spots all down the restaurant floor and through the kitchen. He was only vaguely conscious of wide slant eyes staring at him, and yellow faces. He had his two guns in his hands now: he could shoot with the right until his arm began to stiffen up He ran through the kitchen door into the alley.

Why, he was going wrong! His horse was to the right, and he was headed left. And then he knew what he was doing. He came to the third back door, and he went straight to it—have to catch the fellow before he thought he could be around here. The door was not fastened; he shoved it open with his left shoulder, his guns ready.

Empty store—or restaurant or something; no furniture. And there the man was, carbine in hand, peering out the front window. Medium sized, heavy-set fellow. Arrest him—no more shooting. . . .

Get as near him as possible; a carbine had too much advantage at longer ranges. He went tiptoeing up the floor.

What the blazes! The man took a quick shot through the window, and ducked as a bullet knocked glass all over him. That entering bullet did not go far from Tonto—great note, he thought, if a shot not meant for him got him, after what had happened out there. He heard the man speak to himself as he ducked:

"'Ah-hah!' she cried, an' she waved her wooden leg!"

One of those nonsensical expressions cowboys sometimes use. What sort of happy-go-lucky devil was this? And had he butted into somebody else's private gun-scrape? Surely Palpai couldn't be *that* bad—to run them two at once!

Well, he might as well get in a little more work before calling it a day, seeing that he was here. He raised one gun.

"What's going on here?"

The fellow whirled, quick as a cat. But he had sense enough not to swing his gun-muzzle around. For just a flash, his face looked "mean" as the very devil; he could be a tough customer! Then he broke out in a wide grin.

"Why, howdy, Ranger! Nice day, aint it?"

"Fine!" said Tonto dryly.

Why, he was only a kid. His big hat shoved far back, showing a mop of curly black hair and a round, grinning face. Some fool "kid cowpuncher."

"What the devil's going on?"

"You know, I dang' near let you get shot!"

"How's that?"

"Saw a feller goin' in the door across from here, with a carbine, to plug you in case you showed up. You did, didn't you! Funny thing was, he didn't start to shoot at you till you'd got Deuce. Reckon I forgot him, watchin' your gun-scrape—plumb interestin'! I looked back at him jest as he was startin' to take a crack at you, an' I slung one at him. . . . Oh, 'scuse my bad manners—I'm Curly Johnson."

How *he'd* got mixed up in this was a mystery to Tonto, but there was no time to find out now.

"Who is he?"

"Feller called Blacky Dowlan."

Tonto had guessed it! Blacky, the lookout, had allowed him to kill Deuce. Then Blacky had tried to kill him, to get the "commission," as well as the credit for it, which should help him to Deuce's place with Pierce. Nice mess of Blacky Dowlan treachery! He'd like to arrest Blacky; he had special reasons of his own for wanting to do it. But he could not, now, for a cause which Curly soon saw.

"Good Lord, Ranger, yo're all shot up!"

"I'm bleeding. Could you tie it up quick? If I don't get out of here in a hurry—"

"You won't at all," finished Curly. "You can't fight a town."

He threw a couple of quick shots over, to hold Blacky there and to keep others off the street for a while. Then with a piece of his own shirt—all there was—he put hasty and crude bandages on Tonto's forearm and leg. They would at least partly stop the flow of blood for a time.

"Where you aimin' to go, Ranger?" he asked with concern.

Tonto decided to tell him. After helping him, he would not give him away.

"Rafter Bar."

"You can't make it, the shape yo're in! Say—I'll go along with you an' help you."

"They'll be after me, and throwing lead."

"I didn't reckon they'd be throwin' posies at us."

He tried to say it with the dry, nonchalant air of an old-timer, but from his face Tonto saw that the kid felt pretty scared. But he'd do it. Why?

"No—I've got another horse out of town; yours would be ridden down when we got there. Say! Would you get out the other side of town, and meet me at a pointed red hill?" Nell had given him that as a landmark on the way to the ranch.

"Shore will, Ranger! I know where you mean. I'm sticking with you from now on."

"Well—I'd better hurry."

Running with a limp back through the rear door, Tonto heard a fusillade from Curly's carbine up in front. It didn't take him long to get to the pinto and mount—he remembered about the right-hand side, or he might have got bucked off. He hoped Curly's shooting out there would hold up pursuit for a few minutes.

It didn't. Perhaps all that saved him was that everyone thought he'd be riding his dun, and nobody was watching this pinto. He had hardly got going before he heard yells back there, and a few men began to swing in behind him, darting on their horses around corners.

The stubby little paint was all Cosayee said it was. Its belly went close to the ground, and it fairly flew; almost before Tonto knew it, he was at the foot of the rough trail and climbing. Halfway up, it was panting furiously, but still he pressed it. A look back showed riders—over a dozen now—starting up the trail. They were saving their horses; even if they lost sight of him on top, they thought, he could not go far at this rate. He'd fool 'em!

The pinto was staggering those last few feet; he was black with sweat, his flanks pumping.

"Good little pony! Go it—little way more!"

He burst onto the mesa. There was Zeeb, saddled, a boy holding him. Tonto swung his quirt for the last short dash, to the Navajo camp.

Near the dun stood a tall buck he had heard called Takkaä. Tonto did not pay much attention to him; he was preparing for a quick change of mounts. He had already loosened his boot in the stirrup, to swing off, when he saw Takkaä roughly shove the boy aside and leap into the saddle.

There he went, racing off, looking back with a sneer. He waved his hand.

"I'm borrowing your horse, brother Tonto! I'll bring it back soon."

Chapter Six

NEVER in his life had Tonto had such a sudden lost feeling. The shock of it struck him like a blow between the eyes, it was so totally unexpected. Why did Takkaä want him caught? He'd done nothing to the man; he'd hardly noticed him!

And Cosayee had not expected it either; there was consternation on his face. Tonto swung off the pinto; no use whatever trying to go farther on him. Anyhow, he had a queer, weak feeling: he'd lost a good deal of blood, and he was still losing some. That was slowing his wits. It was Cosayee—clever, tricky—who took the lead. He pointed quickly to a hogan.

"In there, brother Lannabi!" He turned to the boy. "Houda, get the pinto out of sight!"

Young though he was, Houda knew how to have him going fastest. He quickly tore off saddle and bridle, and struck the horse across the rump with the reins. Yelling, following in a swift run, he headed him for the piñons.

The camp was beginning to blur before Tonto's eyes. He was blundering toward the hogan when he felt a hand guiding him, and heard a sweet, gentle voice:

"Come, Lannabi. I will take care of you."

It took him a moment to understand it. He looked down, in a daze. Black, doelike eyes were looking up at him from a coppery face. The girl helped him quickly through the doorway and pulled the heavy rug into place behind. She eased him down on a pile of home-woven blankets and skins.

"Nahli will care for you, Lannabi. Do not worry."

This was the second unexpected friend he'd found in a few minutes! He could not understand. He raised himself on one elbow.

"They'll search here! They'll find me!"

And—bitter thought!—he'd be in no condition to fight.

HE SAW HER PRETTY, light-copper face go blank, so hard was she thinking. She was quick-witted, like all her people.

"I have a plan—it's coming!"

She thrust the rug aside and darted out. He could hear her voice pouring words at Cosayee. And Cosayee began to shout orders.

"Nnuk-kaa! Hurry—with your medicine drum! Somebody build a little fire—quick—there! Bring green leaves!"

Moccasined feet went pattering fast, men's and squaws'. Tonto dragged himself to the door, raised a corner of the rug, and peered out. He had to stay conscious! Already a little fire was going a yard or so from him, and the withered old medicine-man came hobbling quickly to throw himself squatting beside it. Somebody called:

"They come!"

In an instant the camp had settled down. Those who appeared at the head of the trail saw a group of grave, silent bucks, blanket-wrapped, sitting around the central fire, some of them smoking—they looked as if they might not have moved in hours. By one hogan the medicine-man was pounding his tom-tom with his hands, one of which he sometimes reached out to cast green leaves on his little fire. He was chanting monotonously, in doleful tones that never paused as they rode up; he did not look at them. And by him, her hair down over her face, and Indian girl crouched, sobbing broken-heartedly.

A shout. "Seen a feller go by here on a horse?"

Slowly one Indian in the circle raised his face. He shook his head blankly; not a word of English did any of them seem to know.

"Listen! You can't get by with that—he was ridin' one of yore ponies!"

"*Huh-h-h!*" Another blank head-shake.

"My Gawd, but Injuns is dumb! We want tracker—savvy tracker?"

The tall, thin Cosayee stood up gravely. He looked stupid as only a Navajo can—when he chooses.

"Me chief. Me spik Inglis." Yes, and wrote it better than any of them, if he hadn't forgotten how! He bit each word off from the rest in a short grunt, "Mih—chif."

"Where man on hoss go?"

"Man! Hoss! *Huh-h-h.* Him—go." He pointed west. "Stealum hoss—Injun hoss."

"Got a tracker here? Savvy tracker?"

Cosayee pointed to Hoos-na. "Him track." He spoke quickly in his own tongue with Hoos-na, and turned back. "Him say—ten dolla, now."

The man jerked a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and offered it. Hoos-na shook his head. "Ten dolla," repeated Cosayee. Ten silver dollars were found among the crowd—the Indians had been fooled too often with bad paper money. Hoos-na took the coins and counted them carefully, thrust them somewhere.

"Git off, Dave, and give him yore hoss to ride!"

Dave did, reluctantly, and Hoos-na swung deliberately into the saddle. Peering beside the rug, Tonto heard

Cosayee give the man his instructions: A Navajo had left camp that morning, riding to the distant village of Kin-seet; he would track that man a long way, and then lose the trail.

"Let's go!"

Tonto gave a weak sigh of relief. His head kept wanting to sink down, and things out there were trying to blur up; only by a great effort of will was he staying conscious. But another spoke suddenly.

"Let's search this camp before we go! Navvies is tricky, and he was ridin' one of their ponies."

Tonto jerked to his senses and reached a shaking left hand for one of his guns—the other was numb now. He saw the speaker and two more spring from their horses and run to the nearest hogan, to peer in—a glance showed the little hut empty. They went to the second.

And here they came! Tonto cocked his gun. What would they do if they captured him alive? Lynch him, probably!

"Well, good-by, Tonto!" he told himself, with a weak, wry grin. This was what he might have expected, being fool enough to come to Palpai.

But the man who had suggested the search stopped suddenly.

"What's in there?"

Old Nnuk-kaa was pounding away on the tom-tom, chanting dolefully, and sometimes carefully placing a green leaf or two on the tiny fire beside him. The Indian girl, bowed low with her hair over her face, was moaning and rocking broken-heartedly.

"Squaw," said Cosayee indifferently.

"What's wrong with her?"

"*Huh-h-h!* No ketchum name. Sick mak holes in face. Hole rot. Mebbeso die."

"Smallpox! My Gawd!"

"Let's go!" shouted another with a shiver—and off they went in a cloud of dust. Dave, the man left afoot, headed for the Palpai trail, with a scared glance over-shoulder.

The solemn gravity of the Indian camp lasted until they were well out of sight, and then a laugh went up, from bucks and squaws. The Navajo is an eternal joker, when there are no strangers around—and what joke better than one on whites?

Only one stayed serious. Old Nnuk-kaa still pounded away with grave face, chanting dolefully as if his own life depended on it. A pause to listen to him, and again the Indians went into a gale of laughter. His "medicine-chant" was the most funny, bawdy song of the tribe—and they had plenty of the kind. It had been hard to keep straight faces with that going on all the time; only Navajos could do it.

Nahli darted into the hogan, thrusting the rug aside. At her moccasins lay Tonto, his pale face turned to the mud roof, his eyes glazed, and a cocked gun beside his limp fingers. Her hands went to her cheeks, and her scream could be heard far.

TONTO FELT AS IF HE were floating. He floated slowly back to consciousness. He saw a man standing over him, a young white man, with a stethoscope in his hand. And a girl was kneeling by him. A young Navajo squaw—easily the most beautiful Indian girl he'd ever seen, in face and figure. He remembered noticing her with wonder before, when he was up at the Navajo camp. Why, that's where he was now—in a hogan, lying on some skins and blankets!

The doctor saw his eyes moving.

"How d'you feel?"

"Fine!"

He saw the doctor smile.

"What—shape am I in?"

"Two flesh-wounds—nothing serious. But you've got a smaller artery cut; if you'd lost a very little more blood, thev'd have taken you to Boot Hill with Deuce. You got him, didn't you!" The doctor seemed thoroughly delighted that he had; this placed his attitude toward Pierce and his crowd.

That's right—he had killed Deuce Willett. So that was over; he'd been pretty nervous about it, but wouldn't admit it even to himself. He looked up.

"Who brought you?" he asked.

"This young squaw. She doesn't know a word of English, but she had a note on a scrap of paper sack saying the chief's mother was bleeding to death, and to hurry up. I was surprised when I found it was the Arizona Ranger."

Tonto closed his eyes; he'd talked enough without resting a moment. She'd got Cosayee to write the note. He heard Nahli's soft footsteps, going out, and soon coming in again. She spoke softly, in her gentle voice—she could even make this harsh tongue sound musical.

"Lannabi, I bring you food. Eat, and be strong!"

The doctor glanced at the blackened tin bowl.

"Good idea! That's all you need now; stuff all you can into you, to build up new blood. And rest."

"But I have to go—I'm not safe here! I want to go to—" The name wouldn't come; his mind was not working well yet, "—to Nell Holt's ranch."

"Wel-l—if you keep the bandages in place; you can't lose any more blood now, or you're gone! The ride would set you back two or three days, but that's better than having that dirty gang get hold of you. Don't try to go alone, though! You might pass out any time."

The girl was raising Tonto's shoulders and bringing greasy soup to his mouth with a rusty spoon. Never had there been a gentler nurse. This stuff might not be appetizing, but it would certainly give strength. Tonto said:

"Why, it's daylight!"

"Sure; nearly noon. I gave you a hypo last night, and you were still sleeping like a top when I came back now." So that explained part at least of his muddled head.

FOR A WHILE THE DOCTOR—his name was Wentworth—stayed, talking sociably; he seemed to have taken a liking to Tonto. At last he picked up his black bag and started under the low doorway. Tonto called to him.

"Wait! I've some money in my trousers pocket."

Doctor Wentworth turned back with a look that was almost annoyance on his face.

"Listen, Tonto! I've lived in that damn' town down there nearly three years now, and you're a Ranger trying to clean it up. There'll be no fee, for you. Any time I can help you, let me know. See you later."

Tonto heard his horse trotting off. He finished eating; he felt much better immediately, after the hot soup. Nahli gently helped him lie down again, arranging soft sheepskins under his head. "Sleep, Tonto, sleep!" she breathed, her small hand on his forehead. And then, as to a child, she began singing softly:

Winds from the desert come whispering;
Whispering too are the yellow sands blowing.
It is the spirits that whisper—whisper of sleep.

Queer. . . . Very queer! . . . Nell Holt was singing to him. . . . Singing in Navajo! . . . She had red hair. . . . An Indian girl with bright red hair! . . .

The raising of the door-rug woke him. He saw stars out there, and against them a figure slipping quietly in, a man's figure. A man, slipping in! He felt for his guns. But a voice came—Cosayee's.

"Are you awake, Lannabi?"

"Yes."

"You must go, before daylight. At dusk we saw a man spying on this camp from a hill; those whom Hoos-na led away have returned, and they suspect that the trail was not yours. Hoos-na knows a little English and partly understood them. I expect them here at dawn."

From a figure crouched beside him came a gentle voice.

"Yes! You must go, and swiftly, Tonto!"

Cosayee went on:

"I have your horse saddled, and told two men to be mounted and ready to ride with you; you will need them, for you are still very weak."

To his surprise, Tonto found that he had little trouble in standing up. He crossed the small floor—yes, he could walk, lamely, but of course not far.

"Good!" grunted Cosayee. He helped him through the doorway.

Three horses with empty saddles stood there, and beside two of them were figures with their blankets drawn up to their eyes in the chill air of late night. They came forward, one on each side, to help him mount. One of them spoke, and he recognized the voice of Hoos-na.

"Let us lift you, Lannabi. Save your strength for riding."

The other said nothing. Nahli had followed him out. She spoke suddenly:

"Who are you—the other one?"

She peered at him, but the light from the low camp fire was faint out here. He answered in a muffled tone, through his blanket.

"I am he who is called Nana."

A scream like a she-panther's came from her, and she flew at him, tearing the blanket down, clawing at his eyes.

"Takkaä! You would kill him on the way! You would leave him to die!"

With a furious oath, he dropped his blanket and struck her, knocked her down. She leaped up, a long knife gleaming faintly in her hand.

"I kill! I *kill!*"

Takkaä turned and ran to his carbine, resting against a boulder. He snatched it up and threw a cartridge into the chamber.

"I am shooting the she-coyote! I am killing both of them!"

Cosayee's wiry figure darted behind him; he knocked the barrel up and sent the shot into the air.

"Come help me hold him!" he shouted. Others rushed in; there was a scuffle, figures rolling on the ground.

And around them ran that untamed girl, her eyes blazing wildly, trying to find Takkaä's figure to plunge the long knife into it.

"I will cut his heart out, now!"

Squaws and bucks came running—no Navajo, whatever his faults, is a coward. They seized her; it took all of them to take the knife from her; they dragged her, biting and scratching madly, off to a hogan.

Tonto stood weakly with his mouth open. What it was all about, he did not know. And that gentle, beautiful girl who had nursed him so tenderly—sung so softly to him. Good God, she was a wildcat!

Cosayee came hurrying back to him, panting.

"Mount swiftly, Tonto! This noise may have been heard, and the shot. Hoos-na and another go with you."

"But what was it about?"

"No time to talk. Hoos-na will explain as you ride. Go!"

Even at night, the Indians knew where soft ground lay. The three horses struck out in a lope, weak though Tonto was, but there was hardly a sound from their hoofs.

Chapter Seven

NELL HOLT had been very quiet all day, and she looked pale. But she had worked quickly and competently around the house as was her way; she had not gone riding, and on these days when she stayed at home, there were a thousand things to do. Now, supper dishes at last washed, she came into the living room. Absently she lowered the wick of the lamp, which was on the point of smoking. She sat down and reached for her mending on the table; there was much mending here, to make things do.

Her father was there, a withered, gray-haired little cattle-man with a gentle face, and near him were propped his crutches. Opposite him sat Curly Johnson; he'd got here late the night before—in the middle of the night.

"It's jest too dang bad!" said the old man, breaking the silence. He shook his head regretfully.

"You're sure he's—dead?" Nell's voice sounded thin, and she turned so that they would not see her face.

"The pore cuss is, all right," said Curly sadly. "If they hadn't got him, he'd have met me; he couldn't go nowhere alone. I waited hours after when he said, at the red hill. . . . You know," he added gloomily, "that Ranger seemed to be one heck of a fine feller!"

"He was," agreed Nell, quietly but with conviction.

"You know," went on Curly, "pretty near anything can happen in this Arizona Territory! I been around, clean up to Montana, and to say this Palpai country is the toughest I ever run into aint beginning to say nothing about it. Why in blazes don't they clean it up?"

"Uh-huh—pretty near anything can happen here."

OLD DAVE GLANCED at his crutches. Six months ago he wasn't a cripple; he was leading his men over the range, until a slug from some ambush caught him in the hip. And now his outfit, which he'd been all his life building up, was gone—as good as gone. Pretty tough for an old cripple and his daughter to lose their place and have to get out into the world. If he could only ride, he might hold some sort of cowpunching job, in spite of his age.

"Uh-huh," old Dave sighed. "It's easy to say 'clean it up,' but doing it is another thing. That's a job for the Rangers, and they got only about fifteen of 'em for all Arizona. See what happened when they tried, and sent Tonto Jim in here? He got killed first day."

Another long, gloomy silence.

"Ma'am," began Curly Johnson blunderingly; he didn't know just how to say it, "about you not bein' able to pay another cowpuncher, even if you do need one—aw, t'heck with that! If I got money, I'd only blow the dang stuff anyhow. I mean—uh—well, I'll be honest for once in my life: I got mixed up in some things, and I got about ninety-nine years comin' if they ketch me."

"*You* have!" She looked up at his boyish face.

"Mebbe more," he admitted darkly. "I aint what you'd think to see me. What I'm gitting at: this Rafter Bar would be a fine hide-out for me, and of course I wouldn't want no pay for you lettin' me stick around—sort of permanent chuck-line hand. I'd get in as many hours ridin' as the next feller, and I'm pretty fair at forkin' broncs."

He was beet-red. She set her mending in her lap and looked long at him; he did not meet her eye.

"Of course, as I said, we'd like to have you, Curly—we know you'd be a good cow-hand. It's only that the outfit is broke; we expect to be closing things out inside of a month or so. If you want to stay that long—"

"Fine! You can cut me out a string in the morning. Now if Tonto Jim hadn't gone and got killed—" He shook his head and began slowly to roll a cigarette.

A sudden loud knock came on the door. It was not a knock; it was a slow, hard pounding with a fist.

"What the hell!" Curly dived for his gun-belt, hanging on the wall.

The old man turned a calm, gentle face to him.

"Son, hand me that carbine over there."

Curly hesitated. Might as well! The crowd around this part of Arizona wouldn't be above shooting a cripple—shooting all three of them down, so that there would be no witnesses. Such things had happened before in the range country. The other Rafter Bar cowboys were camped at Blue Tank, branding.

Again that slow, pounding knock—louder, harder. And here, it was the invariable custom for a stranger riding

up to shout before he got close, to give notice of his coming.

"Here!" Curly thrust the carbine into the old man's hands.

Dave calmly threw a cartridge into the chamber; he left the gun cocked, and laid it across his lap. Curly was hastily buckling on his belt. He turned quickly.

"Get out of here, Nell!"

"No—I'm staying." She too had picked up a rifle; that, more than anything else, told the condition of the Palpai district.

"I'm comin'!" shouted Curly, as a third measured pounding shook the door.

With wary eyes and tense hand, he crossed over. He hesitated a bare instant—God only knew what might happen!—and suddenly jerked the door open, stepped back and to one side.

A tall, dirty Navajo buck stood there alone; he too had a carbine. Without a word—he knew no English—he stepped softly on his moccasins into the room. He stood there, his sharp, glinting eyes taking in everything, looking over the three. Then he turned slowly—one could see the big, woolen-bound knot of black hair on his neck, under the uncreased, greasy Stetson. He closed the door, going out, and there was no sound from his moccasins to tell whether he still stood out there or not.

"What the heck!" Curly stared at the other two.

"Maybe," said the old man wearily, "they've hired the Navajos to clean us up—they'd do a good job of it!"

The three remained still, silent; they did not know what to do. And suddenly a new sound began outside. A queer, soft shuffling that seemed to come up the porch stairs, and mixed with it what seemed like hesitant boot steps. The door was flung open.

"Tonto!" Nell screamed it, almost; she rushed to him.

He had his arms around the shoulders of two tall, mean-looking Navajo bucks, who were helping him. His face was the dismal whitish-yellow of a very tanned man who has lost much blood. But he was grinning.

"Don't get scared! I'm not as bad as I look. I'd have got here earlier but—had to rest—several times—lie down."

"Well, you son-of-a-gun!" Curly wore a relieved grin.

"Bring him back here! Put him to bed."

The Navajos did not understand her, but they followed her into the bedroom, helping Tonto, and stretched him out. Even in her excitement, she was astonished at how gently these savage-looking men handled him. Then, without a word, without even a grunt, they stalked back through the living-room and out the door; they had not glanced at the other three. Curly ran after them. They had vanished into the night, but Tonto's horse, Zeeb, stood near the steps.

IN LESS THAN A WEEK he went to the table with them for his meals—he'd had good nursing. The young doctor slipped out twice in that time, to be sure that nothing went wrong. His coming to see his patient was desirable, if not necessary, but—last time, he'd been followed; he'd caught sight of a man behind several times. So, it was known that Tonto Jim was still around, and his hiding-place had been discovered.

In two weeks, Tonto was taking short rides around the ranch, and growing restless. He limped a bit, but it was mostly the remaining stiffness in his right forearm that kept him here idle.

He sat on the porch one evening in the twilight, with Nell and Curly—the other cowboys were not home yet. He turned to Curly with a puzzled look.

"You know, I never did figure out why you helped me in that scrape—and why you say you want to stick around with me now."

"That's easy—after I tell you. I—uh—got in a little trouble. I figured I might get a pardon if I helped a Ranger out—it's been done before."

Tonto stared at the round, innocent face. Like Nell, he could not believe it.

"What did you do?"

"Why—uh—some picadillies is all."

TONTO RUBBED HIS CHIN. "I'm no buck school-ma'am, but there's a word, peccadilloes—would that be what you mean?"

"Aint shore of that word, are you?" Curly looked at him sharply.

"Why—reasonably so."

"Well, I'm plumb! It's picadillies I done. Like—well, for instance, I started driving a hoss of mine to Mexico, and we met another pore hoss-critter all lonesome and by himself. Near dark on him to, to scare him. Why, the pore cuss was actually crying when he took up with mine, he was that lonesome! I didn't have the heart to run him off."

"I think I see—you're softhearted!" Tonto hid a smile.

"Uh-huh—plumb! Well, there was a couple more hosses lost and not knowing where to go—*you* savvy. Just heck to be as softhearted about hosses as I am!"

"How many did you have when you hit the line?"

"Eighteen. But I didn't hit it. A deppity sheriff didn't like the color of my hair, and took in after me. I'll never know how it happened, but my gun went off by accident, and plugged him."

"Killed a deputy sheriff!" gasped Tonto.

"Think *I'd* kill anybody?" asked Curly indignantly. "I missed him—I mean, I only sort of scratched his shoulder; he got over it in no time."

"What else have you done?"

"Well—you know cows are more gree-garious than hosses, even. You start to drive only one somewhere, and first thing you know—well, *you* know!"

"And you think you can get a pardon, after that!"

"No harm in trying, is there? I aint asking you to promise nothing—you can't, I reckon. But if you'll let me stick around with you, and if we can find enough trouble to git into, on the Ranger side—well, they *might* sort of jar loose with one for me."

A crooked grin came to Tonto's face.

"Don't worry about finding trouble! If you stick around me, you'll get it in carload lots. I'm just like you, only different; I'm wondering how to keep out of most of it and still do this job."

"Got any we can get into right now?" Curly asked soberly.

"I sure have! I've been thinking hard all the time I've been here. I've got to arrest somebody, for reasons of my own, and the sooner the better. I think Blacky Dowlan would do as well as the next; we've a charge of shooting at a Ranger while he was doing his duty, and also he's wanted down south for a lot of things."

Nell looked at him quietly. She'd talked a lot to him about that interview with the Governor.

"Tonto, why do you want to make an arrest?"

"To show 'em there's a Ranger around here, and not just another gunman. I was sent in here as Ranger."

"Were you?"

Tonto looked hard and long into her eyes. She knew!

"You're right! I know Captain Saunders well, and he isn't a bad fellow—hard, and up against a tough job, trying to clean up all Arizona with fifteen men. Oh, I noticed it right away when he didn't ask me to sign any papers, or take any new oath! And he was stalling around very nicely about not giving me a badge, but I forced his hand and took it. He's clever, all right!"

So, thought Nell, was Tonto Jim—and the cleverer of the two, if Saunders had failed to deceive him.

"So—though Captain Saunders sent me in here, I know I'm not legally a Ranger at all. If I get killed here, why, Tonto Jim is dead, and that's all. No scandal about reinstating him, with the bad name he's got."

Nell's eyes snapped, and her face flamed.

"I think he tried to pull a low-down trick on you!"

Tonto shrugged. "One way of looking at it. Another is, Governor Carson knew he daren't reinstate me until I'd done something to square my name."

"But why did you come in here, then?"

"Figuring maybe I could force his hand. If I just shoot a fellow, like Deuce—why, that's all of it. But if I *arrest* somebody— Well, the arresting officer always has to appear in court."

Curly stared wonderingly at Tonto. Presently he jerked a thumb at him and turned solemnly to Nell.

"Say, you know that galoot aint as dumb as he looks! And besides, he don't look dumb a-tall."

"But, Tonto"—Nell had a worried crease down between her eyes—"you're—you're in here on a gamble—on several of 'em, all mixed up! Gambling that you won't get killed: that you'll do some good: that if you do they *will* reinstate you: that—" She gave it up.

Tonto pulled out his makings and rolled a cigarette: he did not look nearly as worried about it as she.

"All Apaches are awful gamblers!" he said, half soberly. "Of course I don't like the sort of mess I'm in here. What I would like to do would be to take some run-down, shot-to-pieces cow outfit, work like the devil, and build it back up better than it ever was. I like cow work."

"For instance"—Curly rubbed his nose thoughtfully with a finger—"this outfit: she'd shore stand some building up!"

Wistfully, Tonto's eyes went out over the range, with the last gleams of twilight on it. Why, it was this outfit he'd had in mind, and didn't realize it.

"I think it's all a dirty shame!" said Nell indignantly. "That bribery charge—nonsense! But—here you are!"

Curly Johnson turned a sad, reproachful eye on Tonto.

"She don't want you here, Tonto! She don't *like* you!"

"Oh, shut up!" Tonto told him shortly. A man in his precarious position had no business so much as looking at a girl.

"I'm shet! Well, when are we gettin' into trouble?"

"I'm giving this arm another week to limber up." He looked at it, twisted it. "Then I'm going back to Palpai to arrest Blacky Dowlan and take him to jail: some sheriffs down south will be glad to see him. If you'd like to be in on it—well, I know I could use a little help!"

Chapter Eight

BUT the arrest Tonto banked so much upon had to be postponed. Never had he been better treated than by Nell Holt and her father; he was completely as one of the family, welcome to all they had. This touched him all the more—his own neat room, the good meals—after two years of living as an Indian tribesman. So he *had* to help them out.

It was about two one morning when a shout woke them up, and they could all hear the clatter of hoofs coming slowly down the rocky ridge west of the house. Tonto, his clothes pulled hastily on, hurried from his room to find old Dave on his crutches outside the door.

"It's the boys, back from Blue Tank. Something's happened."

Something had. Two of them were coming up the porch steps, and the shuffle of their boots and broken clink of their spurs told that they were carrying some heavy burden. Another burst the door open without knocking. His face was grave.

"What is it?" Nell asked, white-faced.

"Uh—Marty McFee. We found him shot. He's daid."

The other two bore the body through the doorway.

"Lay him there."

She hurried to take her sewing from the shabby sofa, to place a pillow for the head that could not feel it.

"How did it happen?" asked old Dave. He asked it calmly, as though it was the sort of thing to be expected.

"We don't know. We found him lyin' over in Coyote Flat: he was dead when we found him. Must have been bushwhacked; he hadn't drawed his gun."

"What tracks did you find?" asked Tonto quietly.

They turned and looked at him; they didn't know who this tall fellow was. Nell told them:

"He's an Arizona Ranger—Tonto Jim Prescott."

Their mouths flew open a little. Tonto Jim, of whom they'd heard so much! And a Ranger again! She gave him the boys' names.

"Tonto, this is Ed Wiley, and Slim Jenkins, and Newt Britt."

"Howdy," they said gravely. A cowboy seldom offers to shake hands.

Their faces showed relief. From his looks, his old rep, and his being a Ranger again, he might be just the right fellow at the right time. *They* didn't know what to do; all three were good cowboys of the better class, but they knew nothing about this sort of thing.

"Did you look for tracks?" asked Tonto again.

"Shore," one told him, "but the ground's so hard there aint a sign—it aint rained there in two months."

"I want to be out there as soon as there's light enough to see. Curly, would you wrangle?"

Two of the others went with him, to hurry it, but first they talked things over quickly. All the boys but Newt were going back there with Tonto—Newt was staying to dig a grave up on the side of the ridge. Nell would ride to Palpai and send the preacher out for services, and have a coffin made and hauled here. None of the boys could drive in after one; they might all be needed, if something should come up over there with Tonto.

Around a cow outfit, one learns to work swiftly. Only minutes after they'd arrived, the little band, led by Tonto, was swinging off in a lope through the darkness, up the ridge. The first gray of dawn found them squatted on their heels under a juniper at the edge of Coyote Flat, waiting until Tonto could see—he did not want to go in there too soon, to ride over sign.

"If," said Slim Jenkins regretfully, "we only had a Navajo tracker!"

Tonto spoke quietly.

"I can track better than any Navajo."

The other three turned to him.

"I was reared a Tonto Apache. The first game I ever played was tracking jackrabbits through the rocks—whichever kid kept the trail longest won."

The eyes of the three went to each other's. Ed Wiley half opened his mouth to speak but closed it again. Slim Jenkins said very quietly:

"So yo're a tracker, Tonto!"

Tonto began again, in his low drawl. He was trying to explain, which seldom does any good.

"Any doctor can tell you that a full Indian hasn't any better sight than a white man, or one who's mostly white—not as good, on the average: so many of them have sore eyes. It's only how one's trained, and—" He stopped, looking at their expressionless faces. "We'll wait for more light, boys."

There they sat, smoking, silent. They reminded him of those Navajos back there around their fire. After a while Ed Wiley turned, asking a casual question.

"Did the Palpai crowd know you was at the ranch?"

"Yes—a man followed the doctor out once."

"I see. So they thought they'd give the Rafter Bar a lesson not to have fellers like you around. And that's why Marty got shot."

The others never looked up, and their faces hardly changed, but he knew all blamed him now for Marty's death. He'd talked with them all the way here, and

there was no other reason. Yes, it was meant for a grim lesson—no Rangers allowed! But he could not help it! Still it *was* his being at the ranch that caused it.

There they sat, smoking, expressionless, silent, and not once looking his way. At last he stood up.

"All right. We'll try it."

"We? You're doing it, Tonto—we're only watching."

And if he failed, he'd do as well to get off the Rafter Bar and stay off. How he hoped he could find sign! He swung into the saddle and started down the slope in a slow walk, they after him.

"Where did you find him?"

"Over by that tuft of bear grass."

They did not guide him; they let him turn that way. He saw the black stain there. Hard-baked though the ground was, he easily saw the trail of Marty's horse—where it had come in a steady trot, and where it had suddenly shied off and run, riderless. He'd known where to look for that. Marty had been shot sidewise through the chest, so the shot must have come from— He swept the low ridge with his eyes. That clump of buckbrush up near the top was the most likely place—the only place, if the killer had kept his horse near him. Slowly, he rode up, and the edge of the sun was just appearing as he got there. He did not even stop. Instead, he swung off in a steady trot.

"Come on, boys."

HE DID NOT LEAN over in the saddle—merely rode with his face low and his eyes on the ground ahead. A few times he struck a lope, to slow up again.

He followed the summit of the long ridge—almost solid rock. A long, narrow mesa, and he struck down it steadily, near one edge. A mile and a half, and the boys behind, hard though they tried, had not seen a single track. Their faces began to look angry. This was going entirely too far with the shenanigan! He'd probably stop when he could see no more rocky ground ahead, and say he'd lost the trail.

Down off the mesa—a steeper, rougher break among the boulders this time. He'd have to cross that narrow draw down there—soft, sandy ground. Here's where he'd stop.

But he struck out across the little draw. Only, instead of looking ahead, he had his face sidewise now; he was keeping to one side of the trail, not riding over it.

One of the boys said something in a low voice. Tracks of a shod horse showed plainly here, all right—but he'd seen them ahead and swung over to them. Of course men would be riding here, as elsewhere. At a word from one, the three dismounted and knelt beside the tracks, examining them. They found that a corner of the left rear shoe was twisted in very slightly, in a peculiar manner, to match some slight deformity of the horse's hoof.

"Remember that!" one of them said in a hard voice.

They remounted, and struck a fast lope to catch up with Tonto again. He had not looked back; he did not seem to know they had stopped.

Out on a long point of the mesa they rode, and down a steep cow trail. The first of this cow trail was among rocks, but down below it was soft and dusty. No horse tracks here in this dusty place—but then, cattle could have gone over and blotted them out; the killing had been done the day before.

A waterhole down in the hollow. Hundreds of cattle-tracks; some tracks of barefooted range horses, or perhaps wild horses, but no sign of horseshoes. This was the first time Tonto hesitated. He rode well out from the waterhole, and circled—circled less than halfway, then started off west; he had come in from the south. Half a mile, down the bed of a wash, among rounded stones—

A startled oath jerked out of Ed, behind; he slipped hurriedly out of his saddle and knelt. There, in a small patch of sand, was the mark of a single horseshoe—and the left rear corner had a slight, peculiar twist! Silently, Ed mounted. He pushed up until he got even with Tonto. He held out his tobacco and papers.

"Smoke, pardner?" he said quietly.

"Thanks, Ed."

All that day they rode, until it was growing too dark to see further. For hours now the cowboys themselves could make out the trail a good part of the time; the man thought he was safe and was not trying to hide it. And always that twisted shoe. Now, when one of them offered Tonto a smoke, he did it with respect, almost with awe.

"Well, she's it, for the night!" remarked Slim. "Who's got the lunch?"

"I'll get it."

They were near another small waterhole; they had passed several. Tonto rode to it and looked over the few head of cattle there. He picked out the fattest calf running off, dug his spurs in, and ran up alongside. His six-shooter barked, and the calf dropped. No honest cattleman would object to that, on their mission—or take pay for the calf.

They found a patch of reasonably good grass and picketed their horses, "tying them to the ground," in the cowboy way. This did not consist, as many believe, in merely dropping the reins. A big, loose knot was formed on the end of each lass-rope, and this shoved straight down a prairie-dog hole, with earth kicked in around it. Pulling at a low angle, the horse on the other end could break the rope before dragging it out, though one hand easily lifts it straight up. Also, the horse cannot tangle the rope during the night, as when tied to a bush.

They found a deep, rocky cleft—the first head of a cañon—and there they roasted the meat, walking back to the waterhole to drink. No wind could strike them, down here, sleeping with saddle-blankets only, and their fire reflected on the rock would keep them reasonably warm.

"What I'll be doggoned if I understand," said Curly, "is how you kept that trail! I thought you'd have to get down and look for scratches on rocks, and bent grass, and that kind of thing."

Tonto had to grin.

"If you're following a very faint cow trail—as you often have—do you get off your horse and look for places that are padded down?"

"Why, heck, no! I'd get nowhere that way. It's—uh—a sort of winding line off among the rocks and grass. Like a shadder. You got to see all of it or none of it; you can't see a piece."

"That's exactly what a single horse-trail is, too."

Ed Wiley turned to Curly solemnly, rebukingly.

"Yo're plumb stupid, Curly! Why, couldn't you see that trail, winding off over the mesas like a freight-wagon road?"

Nobody's face cracked. They seemed to be paying no particular attention to Tonto; he was just one of them. But when the others had lain down, he found that the best and warmest place—between an overhanging rock and the fire—had been left vacant.

FROM DAWN TILL NOON next day he tracked, and on until late afternoon. The sign grew no fresher; they were going at about the same speed as the man they followed. That was what Tonto expected; but soon the man would stop, and they'd keep on.

It was Tonto who first heard a sound ahead, and soon the others caught it—cattle, a big herd: a round-up.

"That's where he'll be," said Slim Jenkins with conviction. "He'll have stopped to rest his horse."

Tonto thought so too. At least, it was better to risk leaving the trail awhile than to come in to the round-up following it. They turned off in a wide circle, to approach from the other side, the west.

From a gap in a ridge they saw the wagon ahead under some cottonwoods, the smoke of the fire—the cattle, the remuda, men dashing around on their horses. By this

time there was no question whatever of Tonto's standing among the others. He turned to them with a faint twinkle.

"And talking of tracking—" They hadn't been, at the time. "Now, which of you can tell me the color hair of the man we've been following?"

They looked at him, trying to read his face. As if they could! Curly had an inspiration.

"You found a hair stuck on a limb somewhere!"

"Curly, ever hear of a man taking his hat off and butting his head into limbs as he rode along?"

"All right—tell us," said Ed Wiley suspiciously.

"Blond hair, real light. From the depth of the horse-tracks, I'd say he was a small, skinny fellow."

"From the— Huh!"

"Of course I may be wrong. That's getting things down to what even a Tonto Apache would call fine points."

Chapter Nine

S they rode up to the wagon, the faces of the three turned blank, and their mouths were inclined to hang open. For there by the fire—and from his lounging attitude not a member of the round-up stood a small, thin young fellow with very light blond hair showing under his hat.

"Whitey Simpson!" grunted Ed. "He's one of the dirtiest—" What he called him was not nice. "The sort of low-down—that *would* do it!"

"Don't pretend to notice him much," Tonto warned them in a low voice. "I don't want any shooting." It had occurred to him that this arrest would serve him just as well as Blacky's—perhaps better, the crime being greater.

There were the usual invitations to "'light." The cook waved a mixing-spoon crankily—a wagon cook always seems cranky—and called out:

"Hurry up, if you fellers want any chuck!"

They got off, and walked together toward the horizontal door of the chuckbox, where the tin plates lay. Tonto let Slim Jenkins go slightly ahead, to conceal his badge from Whitey; he would not take it off. But in spite of this, the man must have had suspicions. He moved to one side—and caught sight of it.

Tonto stepped quickly out, to clear the others. He did not draw; that would only precipitate trouble.

"Throw 'em up, Whitey! You're under arrest!"

"I didn't do nothin'!"

"Then give me your guns, till we talk it over."

Tonto kept working in toward him, slowly; he wanted to be as close as possible. A sudden snarl, and the man reached for his gun.

The crash of a Colt. . . . Whitey stood there, his right hand raised, staring wildly at it. In firing so quickly at the gun, Tonto had missed enough to cut one finger partly off; blood was spurting out. Risky, to try it, even at this close range. But he wanted an arrest, not a dead man.

Fumbling, Whitey tried to reach around with his left hand to get at the gun, still in the holster—the hammer was bent and made it useless, but he did not know that. But the three Rafter Bar men swept upon him and bore him down, and in short order he was tied with the nearest lass-rope.

Men came running. Most, even, left the herd and rode swiftly in. They saw Tonto's badge, and the question was: "What did he do?" These men were a hard-looking crowd, with seemingly pretty loose notions of law; this was still on the edge of the Palpai country, where Wyatt Pierce's hand was heavy, where he pretty well controlled things. Slim Jenkins constituted himself spokesman, and told them of Marty in grave tones.

Not a word from them. And it seemed that their hard eyes rested more speculatively on Tonto, the man with the Ranger badge, than on Whitey. While Slim Jenkins talked, Tonto was quickly bandaging the hand with strips of a dishtowel; there was some screw-worm medicine in the chuck-wagon which served as antiseptic for it.

When Tonto stood up, the wagon boss faced him. This man, Ike Brady, was middle-aged, wiry, quiet, a graying mustache drooping beside the corners of his mouth.

"If he done it, why should he head this way? It's right square away from Palpai, where you say he come from."

Tonto had to be careful.

"There's somebody in Palpai behind him—I don't want to mention names. He likely got orders not to go back there, to mix the other man up in it."

Looking down on the tied figure, Ed Wiley spoke bitterly.

"Wonder how much he was paid for it."

It came to Tonto that, with Whitey ordered to ride away like this, and probably to stay away for a while, he might have been paid in advance. "Maybe we can see," he said, and knelt to search the wounded man's pockets. He stood up, with a roll of bills in his hand.

"Fifty dollars, even."

And for this money he held, Whitey Simpson had murdered poor Marty, shot him down as he rode unsuspectingly along! There was still no sound from those cowboys clustered around, and still their eyes seemed to rest on Tonto more than on the prisoner. They were beginning to drift off, to gather again out of hearing of Tonto and the Rafter Bar men with him. Ike Brady, the wagon boss, spoke, both his face and tone expressionless.

"You boys are stayin' all night, I reckon."

Tonto thought quickly. No use riding four or five miles and camping; this crowd could find them easily if they wanted them. Better be here among them.

"Might as well—thanks."

When the early bedtime came, Tonto and the Rafter Bar boys were lent bedrolls, some of the others doubling up. They pulled them close together, close to the fire, where the light would shine on them while it lasted.

So much depended on getting Whitey to jail that Tonto slept with him, both of them fully dressed but for their boots, and Whitey tied. Slept a little—Whitey's hand was now swollen and very painful, and he tossed and groaned all night. Perhaps thinking of what lay ahead, might account for some of that restlessness. . . .

In the first cold gray of dawn, as they were squatted by the fire eating breakfast, Ike Brady came up to Tonto. He seemed annoyed.

"That fool wrangler kid! He seen vore dun strikin' out away from the remuda, back toward the Rafter Bar, but he didn't follow him—he's only a green kid. I'll send somebody right out after him. Reckon he'll have to track him now, to find him."

Tonto's head was a little thick from his sleepless, watchful night. He did not notice something peculiar in Brady's manner—only very slightly peculiar.

"Lend me something to ride, and I'll go after him myself. You boys can wait here for me and watch Whitey."

"Hell of a note—making you wrangle yore own horse. But from what them boys told us last night of yore trackin', I reckon as how it would save you time to go yoreself—and you'd be shore of finding him."

He loaned Tonto his own mount, a fine sorrel, fast-looking. Tonto asked where his dun had last been seen, and rode out of camp. He had to cross two ridges and a draw. He began casting around for Zeeb's tracks, and he found them pretty soon, beyond where the remuda had been held, with no others to confuse them.

But—they were in a run, and the tracks of another running horse were mixed up with them, following. Why, Zeeb had been deliberately driven off by somebody!

Tonto caught his breath. He suddenly whirled the big sorrel, dashed the spurs in and went tearing madly back

toward the wagon—over one ridge, across the draw, up the other. Would he be in time? He was white with rage. On the top of that second ridge, he came to a dead stop.

Down there near the chuck-wagon, something long dangled from a cottonwood limb, something that had not been there when he left only minutes ago.

He felt the full anger of a law officer whose prisoner had been taken from him and lynched. Only as an afterthought, it came to him that this would do away with his plan to appear in court at Whitey's trial. Again he put spurs to the sorrel. He swept furiously down.

All the men were there, herd and remuda temporarily abandoned. They stood clustered near the chuck-wagon—grave, silent. The Rafter Bar boys were standing well back, not to have him confront them immediately; their faces showed that they too had been in it—and did not regret it: Whitey had murdered their friend.

He DASHED FIRST to that figure dangling there, and slid his horse, looking up. Too late to cut him down; the limp twist of the neck showed that, the odd way the shoulders sagged. He turned back, rode up to the men, and dismounted, facing them.

"Who did this?"

"All of us." Quietly, from Ike Brady, the wagon boss. "You said he had certain money behind him. A tricky lawyer would have got him out of it—you couldn't *prove* it was his tracks you followed all the way here. Well, he won't get out of it now!"

The truth of that struck Tonto suddenly. Not law—but grim cowboy justice. Anyhow, there was nothing he could do about it now: he couldn't arrest a whole roundup. And even if he did, their trial would be a farce, their arrest only bring him into disrepute, considering how people in Arizona looked at a bushwhacking murder like that. He turned shortly to his three men.

"Let's go, boys!"

Ike Brady came up to him.

"You can ride Whitey's horse till you catch up with yore own, and then turn him loose—there he is, saddled for you. Sorry about this, Tonto, but we had to do it."

"Well, it's done. No use talking about it now." He was walking toward Whitey's roan. He stopped, turned back to Ike. "Will you promise to bury him, right away?"

Very often, in Arizona, a man of Whitey's sort was left dangling there as a warning to others. Now that Tonto was taking it thus, Brady's voice became coldly friendly.

"We shore will! The wagon's moving this morning, and we'll do it right now."

The four mounted and rode slowly away from the camp. At the summit of the ridge, Tonto stopped and turned his horse, to look back. A few feet from the wagon, a man was hastily scooping a shallow hole in the loosest sand, with the cook's shovel. Some more were walking toward the cottonwood.

"Sore at us, Tonto?" asked Slim Jenkins. He sounded hurt, to have Tonto angry at him. But there was no note of apology for what they had done.

"Why—I reckon not, Slim. I'd have stopped it if I'd been there, but I know how you boys feel about Marty."

Somebody down there had just untied one end of the rope, and the body of Whitey Simpson shot down unceremoniously, to lie tumbled on the sand. Tonto picked up his reins and turned away.

They saw his own horse almost immediately; it was grazing on the side of a hill on ahead, and if he'd looked well his first time out here, he could not have missed seeing it. He caught it and changed his saddle, leaving Whitey's roan.

"Do you reckon," asked Ed hesitantly, "we could be back in time for—for burying Marty?"

Slim Jenkins had been thinking about this too.

"There's a man in Palpai uster be an undertaker—likely Nell would send him out; he could fix him up Nell would want us to be there. And—and Marty would. Maybe they'll hold it up for us."

They talked it over. Tonto did not know the country here, but he had seen by the sun that their trip from Coyote Flat to the wagon had been at a sharp angle to that from the ranch to the flat, and they had been going comparatively slowly, trailing. The sun was just risen now, and by riding fast, without stopping, they should get home before it set. They decided to try.

The sun was still almost an hour high when they climbed a high ridge from which they could see the ranch. Ed Wiley pushed ahead, to see over the top.

"We're in time!"

Down there in front of the porch a little group was gathered, and something about the way they stood there, showed them that the funeral was about to begin.

Closer, they saw that word had been passed on among other ranches, and a few cowboys had come. All of them, of course, had ridden with Marty McFee, eaten with him—many had shared a bedroll with him. The grave looks, as the four rode up, showed how they all felt.

"Did you catch him?" one man asked quietly.

Slim Jenkins answered, quietly too.

"Yes. It was Whitey Simpson. Tonto, here, trailed him down—two days' o' trailin'."

They waited; there was more they wanted to hear. Slim spoke again.

"He's strung up; he's planted before the man he killed."

Their eyes went to Tonto, and there was grim approval in them; his tracking had done it. Tonto turned and hurried into the ranchhouse, the other three following.

There in the living-room, on four chairs, stood the rough pine coffin. The lid was screwed down. Nell Holt, near the head, was crying softly into her handkerchief. Old Dave's face looked tired. He made a motion with his head to Tonto and swung off toward the kitchen on his crutches. In the kitchen, he stopped.

"Tonto, I never was much of a cussin' man, but if there wasn't a dead man in the house I'd call them—uh—that bunch in Palpai what I think they are!"

"What have they done now?"

"Run the preacher out of town. Oh, 'course they didn't do it just so pore Marty couldn't be buried right; the preacher had sand enough to stand up in church and say what he thought of some of 'em, and they run him out."

From the looks of the three Rafter Bar men, they too knew what they'd like to call the Palpai crowd. Old Dave shook his head.

"We got to do the best we can. We're fixing to give him the old cowboy burial, like we used to when there were no preachers in the country. If you boys are ready."

Tonto's face jerked up, and he looked at the old man. He had heard of this old cowboy burial ceremony, but he had never witnessed it. Ed Wiley spoke soberly.

"Dave, I've seen it, and I don't know but how Marty would like it better that way."

PRESENTLY THE LITTLE PROCESSION wound away from the house, and up the cow trail to the small bench on the ridge where Newt Britt had dug a grave. Marty McFee's three old partners and Curly Johnson carried the coffin—all but Newt had not shaved in days, and were covered with dust from the long ride, but that did not matter. Behind them walked Tonto, leading Marty's favorite horse, a palomino, saddled—but with the saddle on backward.

Then came old Dave. He could not ride, so he came hobbling up on his crutches as best he could, with Nell, her handkerchief in her hand, beside to help him. She looked pale, and her eyes were red.

And then, trailing along, mounted and riding in a slow walk, came those other cowboys, their hats in their hands. Quietly they dismounted, and formed a rough circle.

Now the four pallbearers were lowering the rough coffin with their lass-ropes. They stepped back, and others came in, to fill the grave with shovels lying there. The sound was hollow at first, but grew duller, and at last they were straightening up a dark mound.

Nell handed her father the Bible she had carried. He opened it at a place marked with an old envelope, and began to read. When he finished, he stood a moment on his crutches looking at the grave. Always, at a burying, one had to say something besides what was in the Book—and he wanted to say something, poor speaker though he knew he was. He began by reading a line which he had penciled on the envelope.

"'*The silver cord is loosened; the pitcher broken at the fountain; the wheel broken at the well—*' As he himself might say it, Marty McFee has rode over the Great Divide, and gone to the Big Round-up. Marty was a cowboy. I reckon he didn't pray much: but he'd take the shirt from his back and give it to man, woman, or child that needed it, and go cold himself. And he'd lay down his life for them too, if it would help them. If it's being that way gets a man to heaven—and I'd say it is—Marty's there now. It's easy to use fine talk, burying a man: but I'm going to say only one thing for Marty McFee, and I think it's the greatest thing of all: Marty was—white."

Tonto had a lump in his throat. . . . Crude, perhaps, the old man's words, but there was an almost fierce earnestness and simplicity in them—all the more, possibly, because not so long ago Dave himself had almost died at the hands of those responsible for Marty's slaying: he had been left crippled for life. Nell had her handkerchief to her eyes, crying softly.

Now came the brief, peculiar little cowboy ceremony. Tonto led the palomino up beside the grave. With his knife, old Dave cut the cinch, and Tonto pulled off the saddle—from the wrong side. He laid it on the grave. blankets and bridle upon it. Old Dave placed a hand on the horse's mane.

"You were Marty's top cuttin' horse, and his pet. Wherever he is, he'll never have to worry about anybody abusing you or overriding you; you'll never feel a saddle again. Go off to the wild bunch."

Gentle as he was, the palomino only walked lightly through the lane made for him in the small crowd. And here happened a coincidence that seemed fitting—no great coincidence, at that, for wild horses were common around the ranch. There came a long, eager whinny from the palomino. He threw his head high, tossing his silvery mane, as he watched a band of loose horses on a distant hillside. He struck out in a proud trot, and swung into a gallop, silver mane and tail flying. All stood watching silently. He ran into the wild bunch, and they milled about, welcoming him—and then, around the shoulder of the hill and out of sight, they galloped off.

A cowboy whispered to another: "Looks like a good sign that Marty's—all right." And slowly they all trailed back down to the ranch. Marty McFee was buried, the best they knew how. If that Palpai crowd hadn't run the preacher out—

Down there, Tonto spoke gravely to old Dave.

"Reminds me of an Apache burial—only that Apaches would have killed the horse. Wonder if that's where the cowboys got it, from the Indians."

"I dunno, son. I 'member hearin' once how they bury an English cavalry officer—mebbe that's got something to do with it. They lead his best horse behind the cannon thing with the coffin, an' his boots tied in backwards in the stirrups. Funny Englishmen would be so like Apaches!"

He hobbled off to greet some friend, and a man whom Tonto had known pretty well several years before strolled up. Wes Carmody, of the Triangle T to the south—a very big, heavy-set man with a taciturn face. A cattle-man, he did not offer to shake hands.

"Tonto, I hear you're in here to clean things up. Sure made a good beginning, getting Deuce Willett and tracking Whitey Simpson down. What are you going to do next?"

"Why, I was thinking of trying to arrest Blacky Dowlan. I'd have done it sooner but this other thing put it off."

"Arrest!" Carmody snorted. "You can't arrest anybody in Palpai and get out with him—you'd be shot. Plug him and have it over! He's got it coming, plenty. Everybody around here's sure he's the one murdered Dan Humphreys a couple of months ago at his ranch. Dan got to squawking over some of his cattle missing; he even was so foolish as to mention the name of a certain man in Palpai."

"Well," said Tonto grimly, "I'm not afraid to mention Wyatt Pierce's name. And an arrest it's going to be; not a killing, if I can help it. My instructions from Captain Saunders were to show the Palpai crowd we've a thing called law in Arizona, and shooting won't do that."

"We-ll—" Carmody looked dubious about it. "I just wanted to say that any time I can give you a little help, without taking too much chances of gettin' myself or any of my cowboys shot, let me know."

"Good!" Tonto's eyes lit up. "Any of your boys here today?"

"Uh-huh—Alabam' and Jess Kelso. Come on over and meet 'em: they're both all right."

Chapter Ten

It was a week after Marty's funeral. Tonto was hidden in a small, brushy wash high up on a hillside, hardly a mile from Palpai; and a bay horse, freshly shod, grazed near him. It was noon, and the blankets on the ground showed that he'd been here all night—ragged blankets, that could be abandoned.

He had just finished a cold meal and stood rolling a cigarette. He'd made coffee before dawn, but he could not risk having even the faint smoke of the driest juniper go up by daylight. Those in Palpai might not see it, but the sharp eyes of Takkaä would, from the Navajo camp across town, on the mesa.

He'd learned about Takkaä's fierce jealousy over Nahli, and he wouldn't put it above him to sneak down and report his being here, if he found out, to the Palpai crowd; that Navajo was a snake! Indeed, he almost felt more uneasiness about Takkaä than about the risky thing he was going to do now.

What, for God's sake, did he want with Nahli! If nothing else, he could not get over his Tonto's distrust of any Navajo of either sex. He liked her, of course; she had nursed him tenderly, and around him she was gentle as a lamb. But he'd seen her face contorted with fury, heard her screaming wild Navajo oaths, as she sprang at Takkaä with that long knife in her hand. Even her father could not manage her.

He saw the bay raise its head and prick up its ears, and very soon he caught the click of steel on stone. Tonto pursed up his lips, and from them came the sharp, ringing bark of a rock squirrel—the warning sentinel of the cañons. It sounded almost like a clear bell, carrying far, ringing against the bluffs.

A short way down, a man began to whistle a popular song, "Nellie was a Lady." Tonto did not know whether to grin or not; no certain air had been arranged for, but the fellow seemed to think, perhaps, that he was teasing Tonto.

Presently he came riding out of the brush—a slim, reckless-looking young fellow who rode for the Triangle T, the Carmody outfit.

"Howdy, pa'tner. Make that squi'el ba'k again."

Tonto grinned at him. "Well, Alabam', found him?"

"Sho'! Cu'ly says he's finally got to the Rattlesnake Saloon, and he's buyin' everybody drinks and slingin' money around like a drunk Injun."

"Hm-m! Looks like Blacky Dowlan might have been up to something while he was outside. Wish I knew what it was! It would make him wanted all the more."

By now, Tonto had pulled his chaps on and mounted. The young Alabaman spoke suddenly.

"See heah, Tonto! Don't you want me to go down with you and help in the arrest?"

Tonto gave him a grateful look.

"Thanks, Alabam', but I think you'd do better to stay out of this, and keep the Triangle name out of it. If Curly and I can't handle the thing—well, we can't handle it. Jess Kelso down there?"

"Sho'. If he shoves his hat back when he sees you, it means Blacky's still in the Rattlesnake."

A few more words, and Tonto rode into the thicket of buckbrush and Apache plume, while Alabam' turned off another way. . . .

Tonto had luck; he slipped into a side-street with nobody paying any attention to him. He had on different clothes and chaps—borrowed from the boys at the ranch—from those he'd worn here last, and he was not riding his big zebra dun. He wore a black hat, which he had pulled well down over his eyes as if to shade them from the sun. And he did not have his badge in sight.

He saw a thick-set, bowlegged young fellow standing on the board sidewalk, who presently shoved his hat back to scratch his head—he had not even glanced at Tonto. Tonto quietly turned into a littered alley. There was Curly's horse ahead, and the *grulla* too, standing with trailing reins. He left his own with them and quietly walked to a back door, where he paused a moment to put on his badge, and went in.

There was a small storeroom cluttered with empty boxes. The other door from it was open three or four inches, just enough for him to see into the barroom—had Curly managed to leave it this way for him?

There stood Blacky by the bar, and only three others with him. Nobody else in the place but the dull-looking bartender—and Curly, lounging over a glass of whisky up at the front. This Rattlesnake was the smallest and least prosperous saloon in town; that was why he had hoped to catch Blacky here. He pushed the door open and walked in.

"Blacky, you're under arrest. Put your hands up till I get your gun."

He spoke very quietly. Blacky was still sober, or nearly so; he had not been in town long enough to get very drunk. He turned, his jaw falling. His hand started toward his gun, but hesitated.

"Better think first, Blacky! You know I can beat you to it. If you make me shoot, I'll shoot to kill."

Slowly, Blacky's arms rose.

THE STUPID-LOOKING BARTENDER had his mouth wide open. The other three looked nervous, tense; they might do anything—or nothing. From Curly Johnson, out in front, came a drawl.

"Gentle-*men!* None o' you would get mad at a Ranger, would you? I'm helping him."

They had gone over this so often that they did not have to think now. Curly quietly closed and locked the front door, and put the key in his pocket. He stood there while Tonto led Blacky to the rear. Then Tonto turned and watched while Curly came back to him.

At first, there was little but sheer astonishment on the faces of those three—of all the nerve! Now they were beginning to look angry. But after all, few indeed are the men ready to start shooting on an instant's notice, at least when there is no real personal grudge. On this moment of hesitation Tonto had counted.

Still, it was a ticklish few seconds until they got Blacky out of the room. Tonto led him to the *grulla*.

"Get on, and hurry! Better coöperate! If there's any shooting, you'll be right in the middle of it."

Here came Curly running; he had barred the rear door. Now all three were mounted and riding quietly off. From the alley, they cut across an empty lot to a back street. Blacky's hands were tied in front, to the saddle-horn; behind would be too noticeable even from a distance. They kept him between them, and talked across him, pretending to talk to him.

They jogged along. A middle-aged Mexican noticed Blacky's bound hands, and his mouth flew open as they passed him. But the way it clamped shut again hinted that he was no friend of Blacky's. Now they had almost reached the edge of town, and a rider was coming toward them, a wild-looking young fellow in cowboy dress. A sudden shout came from Blacky.

"Billy, they're arrestin' me!"

FOR A SHORT MOMENT it looked as if the one called Billy would cause trouble. But he thought better of it, dashed the spurs into his horse and went racing for the center of town, to get help. It did not matter, for already a few shouts were mounting back there; those in the saloon had broken out and spread the alarm.

But Tonto and Curly only grinned at each other. They had all the start they wanted—more than enough. They did not even change from their pace as they struck the foot of the Palpai Cañon trail and jogged on up. They had to go single file here—Curly and Blacky, Tonto, in that order.

This trail, winding up the side of the cañon among red ledges, was far steeper, rougher, more dangerous than the one to the mesa across town; that was why Tonto had chosen it—from Curly's close description; he had not ventured in to see it for himself.

"Mighty pretty cañon," remarked Curly. He just wanted to say something that way to show how cool he had kept. Hell *might* have popped.

"Slow up a little more. We want them to see us and start up after us."

Part way up, they could see the whole town spread down there at the mouth of the cañon. Riders were coming in clouds of dust, after them. They could hear a few faint yells. Insultingly, Curly took off his wide hat waved it back, hoping they'd see it.

"Listen—" began Blacky indignantly.

"We won't," Curly informed him. "So jest keep still and be quiet!"

On up they rode, winding among ledges where it hardly looked safe for a goat, but where a mountain pony had little trouble. Two-thirds up, they were coming to a spot where they would swing around a bluff and lose sight of the town. They looked back again. There must have been twenty riders or more coming tearing along down there now, strung out; the first were just beginning the climb.

"This it?" Tonto was looking ahead at where a particularly bad part of the trail had been built up with a short, crude stone wall, earth over that, across which one had to ride.

"That's her. You'll find the bar in that scrub oak."

Tonto, being last, did the job. He slipped out of his saddle, found the bar, and with a few strokes sent the big stones of the wall tumbling into the cañon-bed, now far below; dust and a sulphurous smell drifted up as they crashed and burst against ledges down there, and the sounds reverberated from the walls.

"They'll think we fell in, Tonto, hearing all that racket," chuckled Curly placidly; he had stopped his horse, ahead of Blacky's.

Blacky began to swear, monotonously. "My, what language!" remarked Curly.

Tonto let the bar go clanging down after the stones, and remounted. They rode on, and presently swung onto the divide. They turned off sidewise for a last look down at their pursuers. The first of them had already come to that break in the trail and stopped. Tonto looked over at Curly.

"I'll bet they're saying—"

"No, Tonto!" Curly interrupted earnestly. "Don't use that kind of language! *You're* not that sort of feller! Let Blacky here say it."

But Tonto was not smiling. He sat looking down.

"That horse—the paint— Whose is it, do you know?"

Curly peered down.

"Why-y—looks like one I seen an Injun riding into town just as you got there. That Navvy they call Tack-something-or-other."

Takkaä! The only one of that band who had a personal grudge against him, or thought he had. If this wasn't a tough break!

"Let's go, Curly!"

"What's wrong?"

They started off in a slow lope with their prisoner, and Tonto told him. Curly began to look nervous.

"We're sunk! No getting away from them now! How much start you reckon that break in the trail will give us?"

"Twenty minutes, say; they'll have to go back and come up another way, then find our trail."

"Then for heaven's sake let's be runnin'!" Curly leaned forward in his saddle. "Let's get all we can ahead of 'em!"

"Hold on! That's no good—nothing easier to track than a running horse, digging up the ground. We'll have to—"

"What?"

"Let me think—"

"You're welcome to!" Curly looked distinctly scared, but he reined back beside Tonto.

Chapter Eleven

HALF an hour of steady riding, pushing on at a fair pace. No doubt some of the pursuers would change quickly when they got back down to Palpai, and have fresh mounts for the second start; and they would not wind them at the beginning.

Northern Arizona is of igneous formation, a good part of it volcanic cinders. Now, ahead of the three lay a small lava bed of a few acres; it looked like black, shiny molasses which had frozen suddenly while being agitated. The cattle trail they were following crossed a long, narrow neck running out from this.

Directly in the middle of this neck, they turned sharply left, slowed to an easy walk, following it until they were heading straight across the expanse of glossy black stone. On the farther edge of that, they found their remounts safe in a patch of tall oaks. And here Tonto's new plans came out, those forced by the certainty of an Indian tracker's being close behind, and one who would do his best to catch up with them. Tonto dismounted.

"Off, Blacky. You're changing to that buckskin."

"Listen! I'm ridin' this *grulla*, an'—"

"And you're getting off him quick!" Tonto told him grimly. He did. Tonto turned. "Curly, you've got to take him in. Take him to Phœnix, and turn him over to Captain Saunders. Find out from him when the trial will be, so that I can be there."

Curly looked astonished at this quick shift of plans; they were to have gone there together.

"What are *you* going to do?"

"Lead them off. Can't risk having them catch up—and Blacky would slow us." Blacky's glance up under his hat brim said that he certainly would if he could. "I'll make it look as if we're taking him to Prescott, then lose them after a day or so, when you've got a good start."

"Lose— Huh! Lose a Navajo tracker!"

They were working quickly while they talked, changing saddles and bridles. Tonto grinned over a shoulder as he tightened a cinch.

"The Tontos think Navajo tracking a joke. Navajos have been partly settled down for ages, raising sheep, farming a little—stealing when they can. Not real hunters and fighters like the Tontos."

"I'm warnin' you!" burst in Blacky angrily, standing there. His courage was back to where he could sound angry now. "You're goin' to be caught up with, an'—"

"Aw, shet up—you make me sick!" Curly said impolitely. He turned back to Tonto, who was swinging his saddle to the big dun. "But yore own tracks—Zeeb's! They're different from the bay's they'll have been followin'."

"Oh, no, they're not! Now you know why I reshod all six, in pairs; I matched up each pair's shoes; they're identical, even to little twists I purposely put in 'em. I did it just in case I had to confuse any tracker they put after us. I need have matched only Zeeb's and the bay's—but it's working out, anyhow."

Curly stared at him in wonder.

"Tonto, sometime you overlook something, come around and let me know. I want to put it in the paper."

Tonto chuckled. Curly stood eying Zeeb's hoofs.

"Say! I was bawlin' you out about leaving them hoofs on him so long when you shod him; he might trip his toe and bust yore neck. Bet a Stetson hat you got a reason for it!"

"I have—a good one. No time to tell you now. Get going! And keep to the brush the first mile or two; they can't be far behind us after this stop."

But Curly, his hand on the horn, still hesitated.

"Tell me, Tonto—it's been getting me worried; too spooky. About you telling that Simpson's size and color hair from his horse's tracks."

Tonto burst out laughing; he'd forgotten about that.

"Why, he'd ridden by me in Palpai. I'd seen him, and noticed his horse's tracks in the dust. I knew who I wanted at the round-up, but didn't know his name. Now light out!"

"Oh!" Still, thought Curly, remembering horse-tracks glanced at only once, two or three weeks before—why, that was almost as bad! He swung on.

"Well, here's wishin' me luck! If some sheriff sees me before I get to Saunders—*bing!*—two prisoners!"

And off he rode on his new mount, leading Blacky's fresh buckskin and the bay which Tonto had ridden. Tonto glanced approvingly after him.

Riding Zeeb, slowly driving the two with their sweaty blanket-marks, Tonto turned back across the lava. At the trail, he glanced back as he had just come, and frowned. He swung out of his saddle and dropped his reins; the other two horses, tired, should stand here with Zeeb a moment or two.

With cupped hands, he gathered a little dust from a hollow. Then, on tiptoe, so that a nail in his high boot-heels might not leave a mark, he went hurrying back across the lava, stooping to drop a little of the dust here and there where the horses had gone. Returning, he carefully fanned those spots with his hat, so that it would appear as though the wind had blown over the dust. Now, looking back, he nodded, satisfied. Let any Navajo tracker see that! He mounted.

"Get going, ponies!"

He swung his rope across their backs, but not too hard. They left the neck of lava and struck the soft trail beyond at a fast lope, the same gait at which they had entered it. Tonto twisted in the saddle without changing pace, and looked back. One continuous trail—apparent-

ly the same horseshoes, same gait—coming along back there, crossing the short neck of lava, and keeping on here. Tonto nodded again, even grinned.

"All right, Señor Takkaä! Let's see you find *that!*"

He had plotted all this first part of his course carefully. His first trick was that of a buck deer followed by hounds, or by Apache hunter. He swung north to cross a long, open valley—too long for his pursuers to go around without wasting entirely too much time; even the wily Takkaä could not checkmate that move. He climbed a steep trail, perhaps almost a thousand feet, to a great mesa, and on the rim he turned to sit looking back.

With little more than mild interest, he watched the band of horsemen—must be fifteen of them—coming in a fast lope across the valley; the tracks of the three shod horses would be plain as a wagon-road there. One, alone, rode well out ahead, and from his peculiar seat in the saddle Tonto could tell even at this great distance that it was an Indian; he had the Indian manner of handling a horse, too. Well, Takkaä had muffed the trail back at the lava, or he'd be after Curly now.

Tonto rolled and lit a cigarette, and puffed hard. He wanted them to see the smoke, and they did: they suddenly pressed up around the first rider. But somebody with judgment sent them back, and would not let them race their mounts. So they would take it easy up the rim trail. That trick had not worked; he had not expected it to—just an experiment.

He turned away, driving his two loose horses—and there was even a knack in that, so that a clever pursuer would not suspect they were being driven. It was much stonier and rougher up here, and it wasn't long now until sunset. They couldn't go—well, not more than four or five miles before dark, after that climb.

THE PURSUERS CAMPED that night by a waterhole three miles in from the rim. They killed a beef, and ate well. At dawn they were on the trail again, led by Takkaä—that is, twelve of them were; three were turning back. And a tough-looking crew those twelve were!

On and on they pushed, in the direction of Prescott—they knew now that that was where Tonto and Curly Johnson were taking the prisoner. Takkaä said they were catching up, but slowly. They marveled at Takkaä's tracking; hardly once had he been in doubt, or hesitated, even where the rest could not see the least sign.

About nine that morning for the first time Takkaä seemed disturbed. He was slowing up, casting about. At last he stopped, pointing to the ground.

"Two pony. *Huh-h-h*—two pony."

"What's wrong, Tack?" This was the name the whites gave him.

"*Huh-h-h*—two pony."

He couldn't explain, with his scant English, but he led them to a soft spot. There were tracks of only two horses there ahead. Somewhere, one of the three riders ahead had slipped away.

"Which one gone, Tack? Which go?"

Takkaä stared, beating his brains for English words.

"Him go—Twist-hair."

"Curly Johnson! He's quit Tonto—got scared."

"T'hell with *him!* He's not the one we want. Go ahead, Tack."

"Hold on a minute!" One of them had an inspiration. "Why not a couple of us ride over to the Swinging W and borrer fresh horses? We could cut ahead, watchin' from the hills, till we found the rest of you again."

And so they did. Two hours later, they were all well remounted on strong horses. They were grinning now. They'd as good as caught Tonto Jim with his prisoner.

But a little before noon, after crossing a long, rocky stretch, Takkaä again began circling.

"One pony—one pony."

They looked angrily at him. They were beginning to doubt Takkaä's infallibility.

"Hell! Which one gone now?"

He pointed to the ground: "Injun."

"Oh—I forgot he was raised an Apache. That's how he learned them tricks he was pullin' on us! Well, what do we do?"

Another, with more wits about him, chuckled with satisfaction.

"What you kickin' about, Steve? He's got scared an' turned Blacky loose—Blacky'll be on his way back to Palpai right now. So Tonto's scared stiff!"

One of them jerked a thumb.

"Get after him, Tack! Ketchum Tonto—fifty dollars!"

On they went, five or six miles more. But this next time Tonto's ruse did not fool the Navajo. No, indeed! He stopped suddenly, and swung off his pony to examine the ground better. He circled afoot, and presently dived into some low brush. He rose up, triumphant, four horseshoes in his hand.

Most of the men looked uncertain. One asked, "Can you track his horse, bare-footed?"

"Me ketchum! Ketchum Tonto! Fif' dolla!"

He did not know exactly how much fifty dollars was, but it was some great amount. Paying him to get Tonto killed! As well as his scant English would let him understand, they were going to lynch the Ranger to the nearest tree when they caught up with him. Good! He, Takkaä, was certainly having luck.

"We got him now!" grinned one of them contentedly. "Them's new shoes, and he'll have rasped the hoofs 'way short, putting 'em on. That bay will be too tenderfooted to travel before long, in the rocks. And he's got to stick to the rocks to hide his trail."

They were nearly upon him, Takkaä said, when darkness made them camp. They were almost hilarious, and they were making big bets on how long he could go in the morning; noon was far the longest anybody would risk his money on, and that only at good odds.

They had eaten breakfast—another beef, killed the evening before—and they stood by their horses waiting for the first sign of dawn. When it came, Takkaä rode straight to where he had left the trail, and took it up, the rest following eagerly.

He had gone scarcely two hundred yards when he found the tracks of another horse over the barefooted ones, heading back the other way. A shod horse—old, badly worn shoes. These shod tracks had been made no more than twelve hours ago, perhaps just before they'd got there.

Or after? That nicker during the night—could it be that some outlaw, some rustler, had been hurrying through here by night, and had stopped to look their camp over, but decided it was not safe to ride in?

ALL THIS WAS ONLY a quick, vague thought to Takkaä, intent on his trailing. None of his business; he was interested only in the barefooted tracks of his enemy's horse, the Tonto's. If those white men would kill the Tonto, good! It would keep him himself out of trouble later on, for doing it. Bad to kill one who lived with whites, as a rule; their powerful tribe wanted revenge, and too often got it. . . .

Three miles, four—five. Out onto a stretch of raw gray granite. Here the barefooted trail should have been very difficult to follow, but not impossible. He began losing it, casting around, finding it again—the Tonto was riding in crazy loops and circles, riding where all his followers would cross his back trail. And he knew exactly where to ride to leave the least sign.

An hour of this. Takkaä made a wide loop, and returned to where he had started from. Those white men were cursing him horribly now; if there had been only one of them, Takkaä would have shot him.

"Listen, you! Can you find that trail again or not?"

"Me findum. Findum quick."

"You'd better!" the man warned darkly.

But after another hour or so of it, his every action showed that he was not so sure. He was afoot now.

Where *could* the Tonto have gone? Certainly not straight up into the air. Or—it was said that the Tonto tribe had strange and dark magic. Maybe he *had* gone up into the air, bay horse and all!

"See here! Can you find it, is what I want to know?"

"*Uh-h-h*—mebbeso find." And he'd enjoy slipping a knife into that man's back, between the shoulder-blades.

Their patience broke at last. One ripped out an oath.

"Oh, for God's sake, let's go home!"

And, disgusted, heads hanging, they turned and rode off, leaving Takkaä standing there. He watched them go, his eyes evil; he hated them almost as much as he hated the Tonto. He walked to his pony, laid his hand on the horn to mount, but turned back to seek the trail again.

At last he saw the truth: this trail had to be found in his head, not on the ground. He went and squatted beside his pony, his blanket pulled up to his mouth as was his manner, and his wide hat-brim low.

Now, if he were being trailed by the Tonto, and had come onto this hard granite spot, with a horse whose bare hoofs were getting very tender—what would he do?

AN HOUR HE SAT, hardly moving—two hours. Noon came, and still he sat. Suddenly he sprang to his moccasined feet, hurried to his pony, threw himself into the saddle and started off in a dead run. Had he, maybe, found the trail? It was only five miles back to their camp of the night before, and within sight of it he picked up the tracks of those worn horseshoes.

At first he lost heart: the rider was not trying at all to hide his sign. But a quarter-mile the other side of the camp, they swung out of the little draw and headed off to the northeast in as nearly a bee-line as the rough nature of the country would allow. A mile or two of following—always they swung back to the northeast. These tracks were heading directly toward the ranch of the red-haired squaw, where the Tonto lived!

Fifty dollars, Long-coat had told him, when he talked to him in his room behind the money-house. Fifty dollars only to track the Tonto, and let the others kill him. If he killed him himself, all alone, Long-coat should give him two fifty dollars, at least! He'd be the wealthiest in the band! Let Nahli look with scorn on him then—with the Tonto dead too.

Till dark he tracked. It was easy now, no more doubling or tricks, for the Tonto was quite sure he had thrown off pursuit.

When he rolled himself in his blanket by the trail, Takkaä was happy. He had been gaining rapidly. Before the sun was at its highest tomorrow, he'd have caught up with the Tonto. He, watching ahead, would slip in before the unsuspecting man and shoot him dead as he rode by. Two fifty dollars—maybe more!

At the first dawn he was up and ready, a dark grin on his saturnine face. Two fifty dollars—and Nahli! A fortune for killing the man whom he'd give half his ponies to see dead. It was a great joke on Long-coat—and who loves a good joke better than a Navajo?

He followed the plain trail swiftly for almost an hour. Yes, he'd catch up with him about noon, or a trifle earlier. He came to a black rim about fifty feet high, and from it he could see those tracks crossing the long, open draw below.

He rode down the break, following the trail. Halfway down, he swung suddenly around the one lone tree there, a thick juniper.

And there, sitting his dun, facing him, with both hands resting on his saddle, was Tonto Jim. He looked angry, but amused. He spoke in the Apache tongue.

"So, Takkaä, you are a great tracker of the Navajo people! Why were you so slow? I have been waiting long for you."

Often one hears it said that somebody has eyes like a snake. Now, at least, the Navajo's truly were—and definitely like a rattlesnake's as they looked at Tonto: cold, black, evil. He had his carbine, loaded but not cocked, lying across his saddle-fork. But he dared not raise it; all the Indians had heard of Tonto's speed with a gun.

"Speak, brother Takkaä! Tell me how I changed that bay horse into this dun which I now ride."

Only one accustomed to Indians as Tonto would have seen that sudden little snapping flash in Takkaä's eyes. Panic! Magic! A hard smile came to Tonto's face.

"Navajo, one must be a good hunter, like a Tonto, before he can be a tracker of men. At that high rim I used the buck deer's trick, to observe you who followed me. That did not warn you. Here I have done the trick of the great gray bear, the grizzly, who circles far to his own cold trail, to strike down his pursuer as he passes. Navajo, why do you not beg me for your life, which now is mine by the laws of the Indian peoples?"

Still not one word from Takkaä. Of course the Tonto would kill him, as he now had a right to do. But he, Takkaä, would die glaring into his enemy's eyes. No Navajo is a coward!

Tonto swung slowly from his horse, watching Takkaä. He reached up and took hold of the carbine muzzle near the front sight, brought the carbine down beside him. Again his hand went up, to take the long knife from its sheath. He dropped the knife on the ground and struck the carbine butt down hard on it, snapping it near the hilt. He swung the carbine against a boulder, shattering the stock, and again he swung, bending the barrel. Mockingly, he reached up the bent barrel.

"Take it, Navajo! I am a man of peace, though such I am not called. Now I give you back your life, which is mine. I give it back—once, but no more! This Navajo, is my warning."

He turned, walked quietly to his horse, mounted and rode on across the draw, without even looking back. Slowly, carelessly, he climbed the opposite rim, and disappeared into the junipers.

And still Takkaä sat there on his pony, with his rattlesnake eyes fixed, unblinking, watching his enemy's back as long as it could be seen. Then he too turned slowly, rode slowly, the other way. Without gun or knife, he was helpless for the time—*for the time.*

Tonto had ridden almost a mile before his lips began to twitch. He was smiling at himself as he reached down inside his chap leg, pulled out some light farrier's tools, and tied them behind his cantle. He might need the trick again: just as well to let Takkaä think he'd changed horses by magic. But he need not have troubled to bring this little file, and cut down the nail-heads to match the worn horseshoes. Only a Tonto hunter would have noticed that tiny flaw in the tracks—or a Chiricahua.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TONTO and Nell were sitting on the porch. They sat there often now, evenings, and old Dave would hobble inside on his crutches and read, to stay out of their way. Sometimes, as he went, a little grin would cross his lined face; he'd been young himself.

They saw Curly come riding in along the rutted road. He came slowly, not with the last burst of speed one might expect from a young cowpuncher. And when he dismounted, he stood by his horse to roll and light a cigarette. He walked over slowly and seated himself on the edge of the porch.

"What's wrong, Curly?" asked Tonto. "Didn't you get Blacky there?"

"Uh-huh. I turned him over to Captain Saunders himself. And the—the—Saunders like to arrested *me*, over that little trouble I had down south—and me bringin' in a prisoner!"

"When is the trial?"

A long pause.

"Tonto, I hate like blazes to tell you, you bankin' on it so much. You won't be witness at no trial."

"You mean—Saunders turned him loose!"

"No. He was wanted up in Nevada for some low-down murder—worse than anything they had on him here. So Saunders sent two Rangers up to the line with him, to meet a couple of Nevada deputies and turn him over."

"You don't suppose Saunders might have done it—just to get out of acknowledging me a Ranger?"

Curly looked puzzled.

"Why-y—nobody can tell what's on *his* mind; he's a real poker-face. He said it was only that they had a lot more on him up there. He sort of hinted that Blacky would have too much drag and money behind him here for a fair trial, and he'd likely get out of everything. He didn't mention no names, but 'course he meant Wyatt Pierce."

"He's—right; he likely would get free. Well, there's one more fine plan of mine blown up!" Tonto shrugged.

"Poor Tonto!" said Nell consolingly.

There was a long silence. Then: "Curly, I was talking to you about my pay. I don't suppose you remembered to say anything about that?"

"I shore did! I jest sort of hinted—said you'd been out here well over a month now, and wasn't there any letter to go out to you or anything? He said: 'Nothing.'"

FOR THE FIRST TIME, Tonto began to look angry. He threw out his hands.

"But what, for God's sake, do they expect me to live on! Do they want me to stick up stages while I'm trying to do their dirty work out here—after they've all failed at it!"

Nell burst out: "They're certainly not very considerate of you, Tonto! They never were!"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself."

Nell caught her breath. And suddenly, softly, she began to cry. She'd forgotten; they were depending on his pay for provisions for the ranch. He patted her shoulder.

"There, there, Nell! We'll have to think of something else."

Curly looked questionably at them. But it did not take him long to figure it out pretty well; he knew that the other three boys, like himself, were working without pay lately, through loyalty to the ranch—no more than was to be expected of cowboys.

"Well," he said dejectedly, "it 'pears to me like this outfit is shore in a jam."

Nell had stopped crying and was dabbing her eyes dry.

"It's finished, Curly. Another month or so, and this will be one more abandoned ranchhouse, to match all the others around here. Dad and Tonto fixed up a deal: all the pay Tonto could spare, for a half-interest in the outfit; he'd paid two hundred dollars already, but most of that is gone."

That was old Dave's notion. Tonto of course hadn't wanted to claim an interest in their ranch for helping them; but on the other hand, when Dave made the offer, he couldn't very well embarrass them by trying to force money on them for nothing. And as things stood, one might doubt if the Rafter Bar was worth anything at all. He hadn't argued with old Dave.

"I see," said Curly. "Well, Tonto was the first man to try to put up a fight against Pierce. But it looks like he's licked, sure enough."

"Oh, I am, am I!"

That was when Tonto laughed. It was a laugh with no humor in it, and he got up suddenly and walked away from them. Curly stared after him.

"Say—it don't pay to get a fellow like Tonto *too* mad! He'll do something reckless."

Nell stood up deliberately to follow him.

"No, he will *not* do anything reckless—not if I have any say about it."

Curly threw a crooked grin after her, and murmured to himself:

"And lady, if I'm any judge, you got plenty of say about what Tonto Jim does."

There was little done on the place next day. Curly had told the other boys how things stood, and they pottered around, disheartened—why try to do much on an outfit that was blown up? In the early afternoon, the four were standing by a corral when they saw Tonto come riding in. . . .

Less than an hour later Tonto and Nell were sitting on the porch. Old Dave hobbled out to the door on his crutches.

"Who's that comin'—in the road?"

They turned. A man was riding toward them, following the road from Palpai. His horse was a prancing light sorrel with high-held flowing tail. Nell caught her breath and turned quickly to Tonto.

"It's Wyatt Pierce! Tonto, for heaven's sake don't have any trouble with him!"

"If there's any trouble, he's making it, coming here."

After this long ride, there was hardly a speck of dust on Pierce's clothes. A handsome devil all right, with his slick shave and neat little black mustache. And his long white hands were in sight, for they had seen him, before he got close, pull off his gloves and shove them into the gullet of his saddle. So he was ready for trouble, if any showed up.

"Good evening, everyone." He swung down without being asked.

"Hello, Wyatt," said Tonto evenly. "This a special social call, or are you just riding around?"

Pierce smiled genially.

"Just going out to my ranch for a few days. Excellent place to meditate, away from the busy marts of Palpai."

"Aren't you afraid of that crowd out there?" Tonto asked. "Those Broken N cowpunchers have a name of being pretty tough."

Pierce's smile widened, showing his even white teeth.

"I'm afraid they're worse than their reputation, bad as that is—but then, it's so difficult to get better-class men out here. Haven't had any trouble with them, I hope."

NEITHER NELL NOR DAVE had spoken so far, but now the old man looked up.

"Oh, no, Wyatt! They haven't stole over a third of our stock. It was other outfits, mebbe controlled by somebody we all know, as rustled the rest."

Pierce looked amused.

"I'm afraid there *is* a lot of that sort of thing going on around here, though surely my men can't be involved in it. Too bad you didn't see fit to employ the Agency—I organized it to prevent such things. Or perhaps you'd like to have its services now?"

"At how much, Wyatt?"

Nell asked this, and curiously, her voice sounded more nearly angry than either Tonto's or the old man's.

"I'd said two hundred, last time we discussed it. But now, with the poor condition the ranch is in, I'm afraid the fee would have to be five hundred a month."

This of course was more profit than the Rafter Bar had made in its best days. Pierce went on:

"Really, I dropped in to see about buying the Rafter Bar. As your waterholes lie, it would fit in very well as a unit of the Broken N. How about it, Dave?"

Dave drew his crutches across his lap, and sat looking at them. Who was responsible for crippling him?

"Wyatt, I don't reckon as how I want to talk business with you, for reasons we won't go into. Tonto Jim, here, is my pardner in the outfit now. Whatever he says is all right with me."

"How about it, Tonto?" Pierce turned to him.

"How much?"

"Oh, I'll be generous; I'll make it five thousand. But that would have to include your good-will, so to speak—you yourself would have to leave this part of Arizona and stay away. Just, of course, so that you wouldn't be tempted to start another cow outfit around here."

Five thousand—a trifle to Pierce, with all his money. Five thousand—a stake for Nell and her father. He himself having to get out? Oh, he could go back to the Reservation and forget he'd ever been a Ranger—try to forget. Then he heard Nell speak coldly.

"Wyatt, the Rafter Bar is not for sale—not with Tonto's good-will, as you call it."

She wouldn't let him leave here! Not until he'd done what he came to do. Hesitantly, Tonto asked:

"How much without that?"

"Oh—seventy-five cents!"

Nell's fingers were tight on Tonto's arm; she squeezed, mutely begging him not to speak. Nevertheless, her own eyes were blazing, and her voice trembled with anger.

"Pierce, you'd better be going! No, don't say one word more, or something will happen! Please go."

He hesitated. But he heard a clump of boots, and saw the four Rafter Bar cowboys strolling over casually from the bunkhouse—very casually, as though they might be going for a drink of water; but they all had guns on.

Pierce shrugged, walked to his horse, and mounted. He rode off in a slow walk, not once glancing back.

"Having trouble with him?" asked Ed Wiley carelessly when they came up.

"No," said Tonto. "No trouble at all! But I, for one, have had about enough of letting Wyatt Pierce run this part of Arizona as if he's king. Would you boys be ready to stick with me if I tried something not—well, not in the Arizona Rangers' book of instructions?"

They grinned quietly; they were grins that perhaps Wyatt Pierce might not like to see. Newt Britt spoke.

"What do you suppose, Tonto?"

Chapter Thirteen

IN spite of what he had said to them, Tonto rode off next morning before anybody else was up, without a word about where he was going or what he meant to do. Nell found only a scribbled note on the table saying not to expect him back for a week or so. But when the week lengthened to nearly two, Nell grew uneasy; and it was with a profound sense of relief that she saw him come riding toward the ranch one afternoon, Wes Carmody beside him. She was waiting on the porch when they dismounted by the steps. They both looked positively happy.

"What's the news?" she asked eagerly.

"The news," Wes informed her, "is that Tonto got me to go round with him and help organize the new County Cattlemen's Association. And he's president of it."

"No, I'm not!" protested Tonto. "There's to be an election this evening in Bobcat Draw—we just dropped by on our way there."

"Oh, that!" Carmody dismissed it as a mere matter of form. "Who else would it be? Tonto figured the whole thing up—anyhow, there's nobody else could stack up to the job."

Old Dave looked disturbed, even alarmed. "Did you get many into it?" he asked.

"Did we!" said Carmody triumphantly. "Everybody we asked—'course we didn't go to the nesters and the kind would be with Pierce and his gang."

"The trouble," mused Nell, "is that Tonto has been trying to fight Pierce's crowd all by himself—and no one man could do that. He should have thought of something like this association long ago."

Carmody sniffed.

"Huh! He should, should he! He couldn't have done it sooner—not till he'd kicked up enough dust around here first to get a name, so's the cattlemen would stick with him."

"That's—right," she admitted apologetically.

It came to her that the ways in which Tonto had got rid of three of Pierce's main men had been pretty spectacular. Had he made them so, purposely, to get him the backing he needed from the cattlemen?

STILL Dave looked distinctly uneasy; he got the implications of this sooner than Nell: It meant a showdown.

"What," he asked, "did they all sign up to do?"

"Plenty!" Tonto assured him. "For one thing, that all of them would stand by any member who got in a row with Pierce. For another, that they wouldn't pay one red cent more to the Agency."

Old Dave shook his head.

"'Pears to me, Tonto, like you lit a short piece o' fuse on a big piece o' dynamite. There'll be an awful bang when it goes off! An' that'll be soon."

"Don't you think I did right?" asked Tonto anxiously. "We *had* to do something like this, and I thought the sooner we did it, the better."

Old Dave eased himself into a chair and set his crutches against it.

"Yes, son, you done right! Only one thing you done wrong: you didn't ask me to be the first to sign up. But I reckon," he added regretfully, "you figgered a poor old cripple wouldn't be much help."

Tonto grinned and pulled from his pocket some thumbed and folded sheets of paper.

"There you are! One of those blanks, right on top, left for you."

"Oh!" said Dave, with a little grin. "Nell, bring me the pen and ink."

She did and he signed—he looked proud of himself, to be doing it. But there was another line under that also vacant. Nell guessed what it was for; she took the pen and wrote her name there, directly above those of James Prescott and Wesley Carmody.

"Now," said the old man, "the whole Rafter Bar's in it—the whole shebang!"

"Fine!" Tonto took back the papers, folded them, and put them into his pocket. "Well, we have to be going on to the meeting." He hesitated; he did not want to scare either Nell or Dave any more than was necessary. "When the boys come in, would you tell them to stick around here and not get out of sight of the place till I come back. And—uh—they might go to wearing their guns, even around the ranch."

"Yo're right, son."

Old Dave nodded grimly. This association was being formed solely to fight Pierce and his organization, and Pierce would not take it lying down. Further, he would realize that his best hope lay in acting promptly. . . .

It was along toward four o'clock when they approached Bobcat Draw. This place had been purposely chosen because it lay about where the corners of three or four different ranges met; there was no waterhole here for anybody to claim ownership of, and since boundaries were very vaguely defined, this was common range and no one outfit could be held responsible for what happened here. The two came in sight of the draw.

"What the—" Tonto looked blank—but pleased. It appeared as though half the male population of this

sparsely settled county had gathered in the cottonwood grove below; there were saddled horses everywhere, and men milling around afoot. There was indeed even a scant sprinkling of buggies and buckboards, although it was at least ten miles to the nearest rough wagon road.

"Wonder if the preacher's got there yet?" grinned Wes. It did have the appearance of a camp meeting. "Well," he added more seriously, "if that's how they turned out, it looks like Wyatt Pierce's goose is cooked."

Triumph on their faces, the two rode on down. But as they came closer, their grins faded.

"We're blowed up!" groaned Wes.

The meeting was "packed." Possibly two-thirds of those here were Pierce hangers-on of various sorts. Of course there was not meant to be anything secret about this gathering; each cattle-man they had enlisted was supposed to get as many more as he could. Naturally, Wyatt Pierce had heard of it.

Wes' face had sagged; and Tonto's lips set tight. He said in a low tone:

"We're not licked, Wes!"

"Why not?" demanded Wes hopelessly.

"Because we can't be! Things would be even worse than—"

He stopped as he saw a man riding hurriedly from the rest to meet them. He recognized Ike Brady of the Turkey Track, who as wagon boss had led the lynching of Whitey Simpson. Brady rode up, his thin face hard.

"Howdy, Tonto. Looks like we're sunk—your plan didn't work out so well!"

Tonto let his eyes travel slowly over the crowd.

"Let's talk this thing over before we go on in. We've *got* to figure out something."

They let Tonto do most of the talking—as leader, the other two left it for him to figure a way out. Presently they turned and rode toward the cottonwoods.

"And remember," said Tonto, "that since I'm up for election, I can't say anything for myself. It's up to you two to do the talking."

"Fine politician you'd make!" remarked Brady dryly. "Well, I'd a sight rather ride before a stampede than make a speech, but doggoned if I won't do it, if I have to!"

They dismounted and separated, mingling with the rest there. Tonto was under a handicap, since he did not, like the other two, know everybody here; but he picked out those he was sure did not belong to Pierce's faction and talked to them quietly aside. The rest soon saw what was going on, and presently a man climbed on the trunk of a fallen cottonwood.

"This meetin's now comin' to order," he shouted.

Tonto hurried over to Brady, to ask who the man was.

"Marvin McLeod of the Kite Circle. He's always spent money like a wealthy man, and his nester outfit has only a couple of hundred head or so. There's hints he's taken Deuce Willett's place with Pierce."

Tonto glanced questioningly at Brady, and he added:

"Some say he was always head of what you might call Pierce's stick-up crew—there's been a lot of stages and banks and things robbed lately around Arizona. That Eagle Mine shipment, for one."

McLeod hardly looked the part; he was thirty-five or so, medium sized, well built, with curly blond hair and a pleasant expression. Wes Carmody had walked up, and he added in a low voice:

"I hear he served a stretch in Wyoming for a robbery."

They turned to listen; McLeod was speaking:

"Men, we all know what we're here for today: to form the Tolleson County Cattlemen's Association." He glanced at some papers in his hand; evidently he had notes for his talk. "As you all know, conditions around here have become intol'able—"

"Pierce wrote that for him!" spat Brady furiously.

"—and we've got to put an end to this lawlessness."

Yes, he had the singsong tone of one coached. He went on to give specific instances of murders, rustlings, robberies, intimidations around here. Carmody and Brady had their mouths partly open, and even Tonto's jaw was inclined to sag. Why, this was a grim joke Pierce was playing on them, telling openly of things he himself had caused to be done. He was mocking them!

"—So now that about every man for miles around has joined the Association, and they're all here, all we've got to do is to elect a president for it, and get right down to business. The nominations are opened."

"I nominate Marvin McLeod!" someone shouted.

It was seconded instantly, and from the seconder's tone he was laughing up his sleeve. Indeed, most of them there seemed inclined to grin.

Wes Carmody raised his voice.

"I nominate James Prescott—Tonto Jim!"

Brady seconded that. There was a pause.

"Any more nominations?" asked McLeod.

Of course there weren't; Pierce's supporters were not going to split their forces.

Ike Brady walked suddenly away from the other two and toward McLeod. He looked imperturbable, calm—Tonto's first encounter with him had shown that he was a man who would go grimly ahead with his purpose. He spoke in his usual quiet drawl, hardly raising his voice.

"Mr. Chairman—or maybe, since yo're standing on a log, I should call you Mr. Logman—might I have the privilege of sayin' something?"

A grin went around at the new title, and McLeod looked disconcerted—Brady was, in his quiet way, poking fun at him.

"Certainly, Mr. Brady," he said politely, and stepped down.

Ike got up and faced the crowd.

"Fellows, Marvin here made a lot better speech than I could, and he said about what I'd want to say as to what's been going on around here, and how sick of it we are. Tonto Jim and Marvin McLeod are up for election. Since we haven't any papers or any regular way of votin', I propose that them as want to vote for Tonto Jim stand right here, and them as vote for McLeod walk over to the other side of this clear place. That way, we can count easy and no arguments about it afterwards."

"Come on, fellers!" somebody laughed.

They began streaming across the little opening in the cottonwoods. With sinking heart, Tonto watched them go, until hardly one-third of the crowd was left standing uncomfortably around him. No need to count; the vote for McLeod was overwhelming. Ike Brady waited calmly until each group had settled in its place. His quiet drawl rose again.

"I reckon Marvin jest forgot to mention in his speech that the Tolleson County Cattlemen's Association is a sort of private affair, and nobody can join it without being asked. None of them fellows that voted for Marvin was asked to join, and all the rest have voted unanimously for Tonto Jim. Therefore, the votin' is closed, and Tonto Jim is president of the Association."

A furious growl rose quickly among the others; this took them totally by surprise.

"So now," finished Brady, "I'll ask President James Prescott to take over the meetin'."

He stepped down. Tonto got up in his place. He had his guns on, of course—he was one of the three or four there who wore two guns.

Only those near him could see the sweat on his face, on his neck; he looked calm enough. Well he knew how critical the situation was. One wrong word, and this could turn into about the bloodiest battle in the short history of Arizona stock-raising. His tone was quiet, but firm; he must let them see that there would be no backing down, by his side.

"Men, what Brady said is true; this Association was never meant to be open to everybody, and nobody can join without being asked by those already in it. We have no hard feelings toward those who voted for McLeod because they were his personal friends, or for any other reason—every man can vote as he wants to. There was a misunderstanding, that's all. I'd suggest that the rest of you form an association of your own—which, judging by how many of you there are, would be larger than ours. If you want us to, we'll ride off and let you have the draw—or do you fellows want to go somewhere else?"

He thanked God that both Carmody and Brady were cool, levelheaded men. They were slipping around among the others, talking to them quickly in low tones.

"What the hell do you think you are?" shouted one of the larger side angrily.

Tonto turned to him.

"I'm acting partly as a cattle-man of this county. Also, as you see from my badge, I represent the Arizona Rangers. Maybe you don't know it, but Governor Carson himself sent me here. If he finds I can't handle things, or if anything should come up that would be called a riot—which, legally, means a lawless demonstration by more than three persons—I'm pretty sure that within a few days you'd find Territorial Militia ordered in here to take charge. And that," he added pointedly, "might very greatly inconvenience certain persons you know."

Would Carson do it? Probably. Still, this was mostly a bluff on Tonto's part; he *had* to say something that might prevent a wholesale shooting.

He saw two or three men easing out from the back of that larger group and toward their horses—the more timid ones. A few were talking quickly together in low, angry tones. Should they fight, or would Pierce blame them if they caused the militia to be brought in? More kept slipping off. And still those of Tonto's crowd stood their ground to a man, silent, but watching the rest. Presently Marvin McLeod looked around. Why, his party was now no larger than Tonto's! Suddenly, unexpectedly, he raised his voice.

"Oh, hell—let's get out of here, fellers! Let 'em have their damn' meetin'!"

He'd had no instructions from Wyatt Pierce about what to do in a case like this, and he himself did not dare take the responsibility for starting trouble; the other group would not start it.

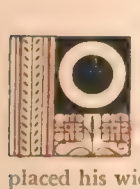
Tonto stood watching until the last had mounted and ridden off; then he stepped from the log and sat down on it suddenly. He felt queasy; so very easily could this have ended otherwise! Carmody came up to him.

"Well, Tonto, you done it again! The right thing, I mean. But you shore had me scared out of a year's growth for a while."

Tonto's hands shook as he rolled a cigarette. He licked the paper and looked up, grinning weakly.

"None of you were half as scared as I was!"

Chapter Fourteen



N the afternoon following the meeting, Curly Johnson and Newt Britt were mending the round bronc'-breaking corral when they discovered Tonto Jim standing beside them. He wore buckskin moccasins—that explained his silent approach. He had replaced his wide hat by a piece of faded once-green cloth, probably dug up for him by Nell, which he had wrapped around his forehead almost like a small turban.

"*What* a get-up!" Newt grinned broadly and openly. Tonto also had on a bleached old shirt of light brown, and trousers that about matched. He did not wear his six-shooters, but carried a carbine. Curly spoke solemnly.

"*Huh-h-h!* Heap big chief—Cochise Junior! How?"

Tonto grinned at them. "I reckon this rig does look funny to you, but it's only what I wore most of my life. You forget I'm an Apache."

"Well," remarked Curly, "as a white man you're bad enough, but when you go turn Injun, somebody'd better look out! What's on your mind, if it's no secret?"

He considered a moment.

"You fellows don't want to know; it's something completely against the law—but it might work. There's a thing I've wanted to try ever since I came here, but with so much coming up, I couldn't get around to it till now. This may be my last chance, before the Association and Pierce tangle."

Curly nodded and tried to look wise.

"Oh! Now we know all about it, Tonto. Me, I think it's a great plan."

Tonto hesitated. "It's an attempt to find where Pierce has been getting his inside information."

Newt looked hard at him, his face sober

"Oh! That thing they tried to hang on the Rangers!"

"They did hang it on the Rangers," said Tonto grimly. "That is, on one of them. Maybe because it looked safe politically—Rangers aren't in politics; they're under the Governor, who's appointed by the President." He stared into the air, and added abstractedly: "Captain Saunders always said he thought the trouble was in the mails."

"I see!" grunted Newt. "Tamperin' with the mails—pin that on Wyatt Pierce, and he'd soon be put where he couldn't bother us."

"Say!" Curly had just noticed it. "You aint got your badge on."

"No. I've written my resignation—but Nell will forget to mail it for three or four days, to see if I'm caught. I'd hate," he added with a faint, crooked grin, "to get kicked out of the Rangers a second time."

They talked a short time more, and then the two stood watching as he left.

"Notice," remarked Newt, "that light way he walks, and how his clothes sort of blend in with the ridge—he looks pretty near like a shadder going up there. Damned if he aint an Injun after all!"

Tonto waited until he was out of their sight—he did not want to be thought any more peculiar than was necessary—and struck a long, swinging dog-trot. Three hours of this, over twenty miles of very rough country, and he began to slow up, annoyed to find that an ache was coming to his legs; he was turning cowboy, his walking muscles getting soft.

Ahead of him lay a small, sharp butte. He had to circle it to find a wash running up that had sufficient brush along it so that he couldn't be seen from below. He reached this and slipped up it until he was against the red rock pinnacle that formed the summit; then he stole around the foot of this between the rock and the screen of scrub oak. Presently he stopped and peered through the brush.

So this was the Broken N! It was even better than he'd have expected Wyatt Pierce, the Big Shot in all this part of the Territory, to own; probably not over two or three ranches in all Arizona could compare with it.

There was a fine, well-painted two-story house, and large barns, corrals and such. From a spring up the draw flowed a stream which served not only to water stock but to irrigate some fields of alfalfa, and also a garden which would keep the place in fresh vegetables—an almost unknown thing out here. This place was not, like most Arizona ranchhouses, merely the rough headquarters of a cow outfit; it was a home, and an almost palatial one.

For the first time in his life Tonto felt something close to envy. His notion of heaven would be to own this place, and the splendid cattle range that went with it. It seemed unfair that a crook like Pierce should have it, while Nell and Dave, about as fine people as God ever

made, lived in poverty on their run-down Rafter Bar—ruined by this same Pierce.

He had got here just in time. Within ten minutes he saw Pierce and another man go from the house to the corrals, saddle and ride off, to disappear around the bend of the road. He could not be sure, at this distance, but that other looked like Marvin McLeod, his opponent in the election.

It was two hours until dark, and in that time there was no sign of Pierce getting back. That worried Tonto; when darkness came, he stole down close to the corrals so that Pierce could not get in without his knowing it. . . .

Ten o'clock—eleven—still no sign of Pierce or McLeod. With his Indian-trained patience, Tonto would as soon have spent another day at least here, hiding up on the butte and watching the place, but for a thought that came to him: could it be that the two were heading somewhere to strike a blow at the new Association? No, he had to go through with it tonight.

But he waited cautiously until two o'clock; the last light in the bunkhouse had been out hours before, and there was no sound but the yapping of some distant coyotes, the soft hooting of an owl up on the butte. He might have hung back still longer but that the east was slightly lighter than the rest of the sky, and the moon would soon be up. He'd have to risk it; it was very unlikely that Pierce would return at this hour.

He stole first to the corrals and examined the fastening of the gate where the wrangle horses were. In case he should be discovered, the first thing he should try to do would be to turn the horses out; the cowboys in their spike-heeled boots would have no show whatever to catch him, in his moccasins.

He carefully approached the rear door of the dark house. To his surprise, he found it bolted—a bolt or lock was almost unheard-of on a ranchhouse. The light in the east was growing strong rapidly now, and by it he saw a rain barrel by the corner of the leanto which formed the kitchen. He laid his carbine up first, climbed onto this, and went stealing across the kitchen roof. The window facing it was open, so all he had to do was to slip in. He found himself in a narrow corridor with rooms on each side.

WES CARMODY HAD GIVEN him a fairly accurate description of the arrangement of the house; Wes had been here more than once, on business not at all to his taste—arranging for his payment of blackmail to the Agency. That last door down, on the left, would lead to Pierce's study. Whether there was anybody sleeping in any of the other rooms, Tonto did not know.

Again a locked door—the study door. Feeling quickly, he found that the hinges were of the better type, fastened with pins runing through from the top. It took him minutes of pulling on them, softly shaking the door, to get those pins out. Then, almost silently, he removed the door and stood it against the wall.

Now came the most dangerous part; he had to risk a light. He stole over and drew down the window-shade; fortunately, it was wide enough so that no gleam was likely to show through. He struck a match and found the lamp, which he lighted; he turned the wick as low as possible to still permit him to see.

He glanced quickly over the room. There was a big desk with drawers, solid down to the floor, and he hurried to it. Only a single letter lay on top, and he pulled it out of the envelope to see that the return address—that of a cattle buyer—was not a dummy. It was not. He threw the letter down hastily—and swore: he had not counted on the polished top of the desk; the envelope had skidded across and slid out of sight between desk and wall.

Here was a blunder! Wyatt Pierce would undoubtedly miss it first thing, and know that his study had been searched. Tonto would have to get it and put it back. Carefully, to make no noise, he took hold of one end of the desk and swung it out from the wall. He groped in the semi-darkness back there, and found the envelope. He glanced carelessly at it before putting it down.

Why, this was not the same one! This was dusty, and Pierce's address on it was not written, but roughly printed, as though to conceal somebody's writing. Tonto's hands trembled as he hastily took out the letter and unfolded it. He read:

Dear Governor Carson:

We have decided definitely to make that shipment on the fifteenth, and owing to the large number of holdups in the Territory lately, to slip it out secretly in a buckboard, covered with bedding. Therefore it would be as well if the two Arizona Rangers which you have kindly promised us as a guard do not ride up to the mine. I suggest that they meet the buckboard at Wiley's Wash, two miles from here, and go with it the rest of the way to Prescott.

I wish to thank you again, and very sincerely, for your kind offer of a guard, since this is the largest shipment we have yet made; it will be close to fifty thousand dollars

Very truly yours,
Eagle Gold Mining Co., Inc
by Herbert C. Cass,
Mine Superintendent

And below that, scribbled in pencil, a single line: *"W.—Here you are—all information."*

Tonto stared at that last penciled line. The writing seemed familiar to him; he had seen it somewhere before, he thought. But he forced his eyes away from it. He was no handwriting expert. He was no judge, and he would not judge. No, it was up to Governor Carson now, when he sent him this.

He remembered the robbery well: all Arizona had talked of it, about six months ago. A mile from the mine, just halfway to Wiley's Wash, a band of masked men had held up the buckboard and got away with the whole shipment. The driver, and Cass himself who rode beside him, had been left tied and gagged—perhaps the gang knowing that there were Rangers close enough to hear shots was all that had saved their lives. Those Rangers had waited nearly two hours beyond the appointed time of meeting and then, puzzled, had followed the road toward the mine and found the bound men. Two hours' clean start for the stick-ups. No wonder no trace of them had ever been found!

That penciled handwriting—he had no time to think about it now, even if he wanted to think about it, which he didn't. He slipped the letter carefully inside his shirt and buttoned it in: he could not risk anything so valuable to a pocket. He struck a match and peered back there; he found nothing else but the letter which he had let slide there. He put that back in place and returned the desk to the wall, flicking around its lower edges with his handkerchief, where he had disturbed the dust.

Now to search the drawers: He pulled open the top right-hand one, to begin. It was full of papers; it would probably take him two or three hours to go through all the drawers and examine everything, and still leave no evidence of his having been here. He reached in, took out a large roll of bills tossed carelessly there, and set it on the desk top out of the way.

Then, suddenly, he heard a clatter of many hoofs outside, approaching. A drunken yell mingled with them. Pierce! He was returning with a crowd from a drunken party at some other ranch!

Tonto rushed across and blew out the light. He knew that his best course was to let them get into the house, get as far as possible from their horses, before they suspected anything wrong. Something else: he must make this appear a common robbery. He hurried to the desk, groped on it, and thrust the roll of bills into his pocket.

The front door banged open, and Pierce's voice came:

"Hell, yes, fellows—beds for all of you! Come on upstairs!"

Here they came, clattering, shouting, laughing. Tonto slipped through the window and onto the low roof. The moon was up now, and bright, but by keeping close against the second story he was in the shadow and could not be seen very well from the bunkhouse—likely some of the boys would be up now, to laugh about their boss' getting home drunk.

Running toward the corrals, he went wide of his course to keep the main house between him and the bunkhouse. Also, he deliberately crossed one or two patches of soft dust, to leave moccasin tracks—to let it be thought he was an Indian sneak-thief.

He had the corral gate open before surprised shouts began to come from the house. The wrangle horses—as wrangle horses usually are—were gentle old pensioners. With no difficulty, he seized the mane of one and flung himself on. Driving the others ahead, he dashed out; he gave those others a good start and turned off, tapping his mount alongside the head with his carbine barrel to guide it. He was in full, bright moonlight.

Only then did the drink-muddled men in the house come dashing out. Tonto could just hear the shout.

"It's a damn' Injun! *Get* him!"

Some were shooting as they stood there; it was only noise, for he was well out of revolver range. Others ran to their horses and mounted. Tonto dashed into a dense clump of cedars and out of their sight.

The stove-up old horse he was on would have no show in a race; nor could he manage it well without a bridle. Leaving the cedars, he flung himself off into a sandy patch—he had no way to stop or even to slow his mount. He struck the ground badly and went tumbling, but he was not hurt. He darted back and crouched in the cedars as the pursuers tore by within six feet of him. He felt inside his shirt. Yes, the letter was safe.

He struck out straight across country, keeping to brush and rough ground, ready to dodge and hide if any horseman should chance to come his way. He was pretty satisfied with his night's work, even if he had not got to search the place thoroughly. Still, he would have given a great deal to be sure that he had not recognized that handwriting in pencil.

Chapter Fifteen

TONTO rode slowly down toward the Rafter Bar. He saw Nell walking to the corrals to meet him, and he passed a hand uneasily over his week's growth of beard—he couldn't be a very pretty specimen.

"Hello, Nell," he said as he swung stiffly out of the saddle. He had to raise his right knee high to bring it over the bundle on the cantle—a blanket, a small frying-pan, a little coffee-pot, and the few scraps of food left; he was back here to get more provisions.

She noticed the weariness in his voice, and that his face looked drawn. Her lips tightened.

"Tonto, you can't keep this up! You'll kill yourself. Two weeks now, you've been trying to cover everybody's range in the country."

He shrugged. "I happen to be the only Indian in the Association, the only one who's had the training to do it. And I'm afraid Pierce has slipped something over on me, somewhere I wasn't watching."

"Why?"

"Well, I can't believe he's gone this long without trying some blow at us—a hard one. With his payments from the cattlemen stopped suddenly, with everybody kicking over the traces on him, he knows the showdown is about here. Don't tell me Wyatt Pierce is going to take it lying down!"

He heaved his saddle to the top pole of the corral and turned back to her.

"Any mail for me?"

"No."

She saw his disappointment, knew how anxiously he'd been looking for a letter from the Governor.

"That Phœnix crowd!" she said. "Tonto, I think you might as well forget all about them, and just work things your own way, as head of the Association."

"I am." He grinned wryly and looked down at his dusty figure. "But Governor Carson—somehow I can't help feeling that he'll back me up when he thinks the time is right."

"Well," she said, "come on up and I'll fix you a good meal. And you're going to bed early, and sleeping late tomorrow. If you haven't sense enough to take care of yourself, I'll have to do it."

"I'm sorry, Nell," he said, "but I have to go right on, as soon as I eat and catch a fresh horse. Would you fix me some chuck in a sack?"

"Go on again—this evening! Why, for heaven's sake?"

"Wes Carmody was going to begin his round-up today at the south end of his range, instead of the north, as he always did. I persuaded him to do it the usual way, and have all his men up there. That'll make it look as if the whole south end is unguarded. I promised him to watch it; I've got to get over there."

"But why should anything happen there?"

"There likely won't. But I must keep my word and be there. Carmody was the first man to back me, to help me to organize the Association, to refuse to pay Pierce. Our outfit? It's in such bad shape it's hardly worth Pierce's time bothering with it, and Carmody's the biggest cattle-man around next to himself. In fact, it's what you might call a trap for Pierce; but since starting at the north was Carmody's usual way of rounding up, it won't look like it."

It was almost dark when he set out; he was riding Zeeb this time. He had shaved and changed clothes; that and a good meal had refreshed him to an extent. It was one o'clock in the morning when he saw the sharp bulk of Black Mountain looming before him against the stars. This lay almost in the middle of the south end of the Triangle T range; a good lookout, and also a good place for the signals to the cattle-men around for which he had arranged, if he should need them. He hastily picketed Zeeb, rolled himself in his blanket in the sand, and went instantly to sleep—the deep, uneasy sleep of a man who is about exhausted.

The cold of early morning woke him up. Stiffly he rolled over; every bone in his body ached. Why, it was dawn; he should have been up sooner. Breakfast? He'd let it wait; he had to be on the job.

He glanced at Zeeb, to see that he was all right. He hurried to where his saddle lay, and took from the cantle the pair of field glasses Wes had lent him. Also, he took his slicker, though there was no cloud in the sky. Then he went quickly up the side of the mountain afoot, keeping to cover, so that he could not be seen from below.

The summit was a big gray granite boulder, with some wind-blown brush managing to cling in crevices, and a few patches of coarse bear grass. He swept the country below, first with his naked eyes which had more scope, then with the glasses. Nothing—as usual. Why hadn't he stayed at the ranch last night, to have a good bed, a good breakfast? Nell was right, and—

He suddenly jerked the glasses back to his eyes. Some cattle were running from the brush just north of the mountain. They smelled a bear—a mountain lion? There was always a heavy loss of stock from these larger predators in a lonesome, rough country like this. He moved the center screw with his finger, trying to get the best focus. He was watching, not the cattle but the bushes from which they had come.

And suddenly he saw that two men, riding quickly and swinging ropes, were coming out behind the cattle. He thought he recognized one of them—Marvin McLeod.

He swung the glasses. Further on, more cattle—three more men. And there, to the east, a single man shoving a bunch ahead. Thank God he'd come on here, tired as he was! Eagerly, he watched.

Cattle everywhere now, all converging toward a spot just west of the mountain, a little flat. Why, the country was being stripped! The signal—he couldn't give it; they'd see it.

The bawling of the cattle drifted up faintly. Those streams of them were swinging together, blending. The first men had reached the little flat and loped ahead to stop their bunches. Here came more, over that high cedar ridge!

They were working fast. Marvin McLeod—he recognized him for sure now—kept turning from the herd, looking back. Waiting for still more men. And at last they were all there, as he knew by Marvin's manner. He could imagine him shouting: "All right! Get 'em going!"

Now the noise of the herd was very plain, for there was no trace of breeze, the air dead still. Watching through the glasses, Tonto saw them starting the herd; they were dropping out bulls which, with their weight, would get sore-footed soon in a fast drive through stony country—they meant to drive fast, and to keep to the mountains. And dogies, which were weak and would tire easily, were being left standing lonesomely behind.

They were swinging directly around the mountain, going to the south of it. From up here, he could now see the edge of the sun, brightly golden, appear on the horizon, but down below, it was still shadowed, softened; it would be a long time until it shone down there.

Now the herd had swung out of sight from where he lay, but the dust of it still hung lazily in the air. Tonto was about to leave his place, but something—caution, his Indian rearing—made him study all the ground below through the glasses. And then, on the high cedar ridge beyond the flat where the cattle had been bunched, he got a glimpse of a horseman in the trees, riding at a slow walk.

Had somebody else discovered what was going on? That might ruin the whole thing—the other might not use judgment. Tonto picked an open spot ahead of the rider and watched it carefully, again moving the screw of the glasses a trifle. He saw the horse's head when it first came in sight, and then the man.

Takkaä! Hanging a mile behind the herd, as rear guard—he'd heard that the Navajo seemed to be working regularly for Pierce now. This was bad! The Navajo was wily. Tonto sidled around on the rock, among tufts of bear grass, and watched until he was well around the mountain, to the south. Well, he'd have to risk it.

CAUTIOUSLY—FOR THAT FELLOW had sharp eyes—Tonto backed away and climbed down off the rock on the north side. To play safe, he hurried almost halfway down the mountainside, to a little bench surrounded by low piñons and Apache plume. He put down glasses and slicker.

Quickly he gathered stones and built a little circular fireplace, perhaps eighteen inches across and the same height. He had to go some distance to find enough dry cedar twigs; it would burn smokelessly, while the pitchy piñon would make a dense cloud. The fire going in the stones, he gathered a hatful of slender piñon needles and laid it on the ground; then he stood waiting until the fire was at its hottest.

At last it was right. He tossed on the piñon needles. At once a dense mass of smoke started to rise, but he swept his slicker over the stones to hold it in. Then he slid it carefully off edgewise—off, and on again. Critically, with half closed eyes, he glanced up at the rising smoke. It was broken—long, medium, short—long, medium, short: The signal agreed upon for the Triangle T range.

Three times he made it; then he hastily raked the remaining green stuff from the fire and tried to stamp it out. Once more he glanced straight up, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Up there, so high, some air current was taking the thinning smoke to the north, dissipating it. The Navajo, directly under the shoulder of the mountain on the other side, would not see it.

How long would he have to wait? Or would the Association men—the leaders whom he had trusted with this—notice it at all? He had cautioned them, had warned them to keep eternally watching, to be ready to make their own signals the moment they needed help. What seemed hours passed—really it was about twenty minutes. He had about lost hope.

SUDDENLY, FAR TO THE NORTH about where Carmody's round-up should be, a tiny, vague shadow crept above the horizon; nobody not watching for it would have seen it. Three spurts; they were meant for long, medium, short, but it was crudely done; he had only explained how to do it, not demonstrated.

And there, to the west! Very far—must be on the Turkey Track, where Ike Brady was range boss. He wanted Ike; he was a good man in a pinch. A messy signal; hardly a smoke signal at all. But his own had been seen, and that was all that mattered.

A third—a fourth! At last there were six of those tiny curls of smoke, springing up to the north, the west, the east; of course those behind the mountain could not have seen his, but there were few of his friends back that way anyhow—it was Pierce country, strictly.

The sun had warmed Tonto by now, but that was not all of it; he looked no longer tired, nor drawn. There were sixteen men with that herd.

Picking up the glasses and his slicker, he went on down to where he had left his horse, and here he cooked and ate his meager breakfast—not in a long time had a meal had such flavor to him. Through, he saddled Zeeb and rode until he found a spot just high enough from the foot of the mountain that he could see over the country close at hand.

Here he built another little circular stone fireplace. No hurry now; it would take them a long time to get here. Now he made a small, smudgy fire of piñon, and mostly he let the smoke rise in a steady stream. But occasionally he would walk to it and slide his slicker across. The signal now was long—short—long, alternately. That meant *"Here!"*

He was lying by the fire when he heard a faint clatter somewhere to the north. He sprang up and turned his eyes that way. A band of men were coming furiously toward his smoke, whipping loose horses before them. Wes Carmody and his round-up hands. Wes dashed straight to him.

"What is it? What is it? Something up?"

"Plenty! Your range is being cleaned; they're several miles south of here by this time."

Without orders, the Triangle men were roping out fresh horses from those driven, and hastily changing saddles, liberating the sweating ones they had ridden.

"Let's get going!" shouted Wes. Tonto had never thought to see the man so excited.

"Hold it, Wes!" he urged calmly. "I saw half a dozen signals; let's wait for the rest to get here."

It took persuasion, bullying, coaxing, to restrain Carmody—all those cattle lost, he'd be ruined, out of business, his work of a lifetime building up the Triangle gone, if he did not get them back. But others kept coming, until at last there were over forty men stamping restlessly around. And last came a small band—only three. Tonto recognized Ike Brady as one of them. Ike dashed up, his horse staggering, lathered—but Carmody had brought his

whole remuda from the round-up, and there was a fresh mount for him. Ike turned to Tonto.

"I'm sorry I could only bring two men; the rest are working the Blue Valley country, and I didn't take time to go after 'em."

Carmody was fairly hopping, impatient to be off. But still Tonto waited, and at last he saw Curly Johnson and Newt Britt riding in. He wanted them badly; young as Curly was, he had come to rely on him a great deal. The other two Rafter Bar boys had not come; he had instructed them to remain at home, to guard the ranch. He turned to Wes.

"Now, let's go. Do you want to take the lead? They're your cattle."

Carmody opened his mouth to shout an order. But he closed it again. Even in his excitement, he kept his head enough to say: "You're doing it, Tonto. You began it—you finish it."

THEN THEY WERE LOPING OFF, Tonto leading his grim-looking little army. He did not exactly like the look on some of their faces; they'd suffered too much from Wyatt Pierce. He kept drifting among them, speaking to a man here and there.

"Ernie, for God's sake don't do anything wild! Remember, the more legally we do this, the better it will turn out in the end. We want law in here, not a cattle war to get us all killed."

He was uneasy about Ike—the man who had stolen his prisoner, Whitey Simpson, from him and led the lynching. But Ike spoke even before he could.

"Don't bother about me! I know I pulled a fast one on you, Tonto, but it was because anything short of stringing Whitey up seemed hopeless at the time. If I fire my gun, it will be in self-defense."

"Thanks, Ike. Talk to the other men for me—I'm worried about some of 'em."

He kept them up on the rocky ridges; so many men riding on softer ground would throw up a cloud of dust that the keen eyes of Takkaä would be sure to see. And now he himself rode far ahead, too far to hear the sounds of those behind, and he dismounted often, to walk some distance from his horse, and listen. It was well on in the forenoon when he stopped and waited for the others.

"I heard the cattle—a long way ahead. See; there's the dust."

"Couldn't we," suggested Ike, "swing ahead of 'em and lay for 'em? Then we wouldn't have to pass that damned Navajo."

"I'm in favor of going right on!" put in Wes.

Tonto thought quickly.

"I'll have to catch that Navajo first; he worries me more than all the others. You fellows keep along just as far behind as you can and not lose track of the herd, till I meet you." He went loping off through the cedars.

He swung around widely; he was in sight of the fast-traveling herd before he circled and stopped, behind a great pile of boulders on the hump of a ridge. By staying in the saddle, he could peer between two of them and see anybody coming from the north.

And presently, through the branches, he saw a horse's legs move. Then horse and rider were in sight. Takkaä, with his thin, evil face and his bright headband around his forehead—foolish, to wear anything so highly colored!

Some swirl of wind must have come from the boulders toward him; for his pinto suddenly pricked its ears out. The Navajo jerked his face forward, his evil eyes intent and his head to one side, to listen.

Tonto rode quietly from behind the boulders and stopped his horse. Takkaä stopped too, and for a long moment they sat looking silently at each other.

"So, Navajo," said Tonto in the Apache tongue, "again our trails meet. I thought I had given you warning not to interfere in affairs which concern me."

After a long time, Takkaä spoke, his tone sneering.

"I am riding to hunt the deer. Why should that concern you?"

"You lie! I have watched since these cattle were gathered." Mockery came into Tonto's voice. "So, Takkaä, you, the great woodsman of the Navajos, are Long-coat's guard for his stolen herd!"

"And if I am?" Takkaä's head came up defiantly, enmity blazing in his eyes.

"I do not argue with you. I am an Arizona Ranger, and I now place you under arrest. Release your carbine and let it drop to the ground."

Takkaä's chin sank on his chest, as he pondered deeply. At last he looked up again.

"Do you not know, Lannabi, that of those of my people who have gone to the white man's jail, no one of them has lived more than two years? The cough comes; they waste away, and die."

"True; so it is with the Tontos, for we are people of the outdoors. But you should have considered that before you became involved in stealing a white man's cattle. It is none of my affair; my duty is to arrest you."

Takkaä sat looking at him, his thin face impassive but for the devil dancing in his eyes. He spoke softly.

"Lannabi, may all the evil spirits of the Great Cañon come and take your soul!" It was the worst malediction he knew; down in the huge gorge of the Grand Cañon dwelt all the dark shades of the Navajo, and of the Hopi—it was an awesome place, that wild untrodden abyss.

Tonto shrugged; he feared Navajo gods no more than he feared this man himself. Cautiously, keeping his eyes on him, Tonto began to slip from the saddle. He would have to go up to him and take his gun, as he had done once before.

He was swinging off; he was halfway down when he saw the quick motion of the carbine rising. He pitched himself out onto the sand as the blast came. He saw Takkaä quickly throwing the lever of the Winchester to fire again. By an instant, he himself fired first. No, he was not fool enough to risk his own skin by shooting merely to wound; he'd had enough of this treacherous Navajo.

The bullet caught the Navajo squarely in the chest, and he pitched off on his face. He rose on his hands, groping to regain the carbine, but Tonto kicked it away. The evil eyes were still bright, glaring up at him with undying enmity, as Takkaä spoke.

"Lannabi, in this at least I have got the better of you; I die like a man, not rotting in the white man's jail."

He was sinking, holding himself partly raised by a mighty effort. And suddenly the effort broke; he slumped, his eyes filming. For a moment Tonto stood over him, and he shook his head slowly. At least the man had been no coward—no Navajo is.

PRESENTLY WES CARMODY came up, and the others behind him. They looked with hardly more than a mild interest on the dead Takkaä.

"The question is," said Newt Britt, "did they hear the shot?"

"Not likely," Tonto guessed. "The herd is a good distance ahead, and noisy. But we'll have to act before he's missed. Who knows the country best where they're heading?"

It seemed to be Wes, since it adjoined his own range. He climbed almost to the top of the boulders and peered over, to see above the cedars.

"They're following Coyote Flat—it's a narrow, long draw. Just beyond it is Wallace Draw; they'll go down that too."

"What's between?" asked Tonto.

"A long, rocky sort of cañon, with high walls on each side. It would be easier to go down it than to climb the ridges with a herd."

Tonto asked a few more questions; then he picked up his reins.

"Let's get going fast, boys; let's see if we can get ahead of them at that break."

As they loped quickly off, he gave more instructions. To save time, with the Navajo out of the way, they circled hardly more than out of sight of those with the cattle. From the crest of the ridge, Tonto peered down at the spot chosen.

"It'll do! Curly—Jim—Newt—" He named half a dozen. "You drop down at this end; and whatever you do, don't show yourselves until they're in the cañon."

Again he was loping quickly through the cedars, the bulk of the others after him. Past the break, they swung down, and half of them crossed the draw to disappear in the cedars.

They had very little time to spare; from the bawling, the point of the herd must already be entering the break.

Two riders came into view, their horses stumbling among the water-polished stones of the wash. These two were handling the point, keeping the wilder, livelier cattle there from running off. Tonto suddenly rode out and waved his hat. Instantly men burst from the cover all around, guns drawn.

Two men—against all these. There was but one thing for them to do, and they did it—dropped their reins and raised their arms. They were quickly disarmed, their wrists tied to their saddle-horns. Tonto shouted an order.

"Get 'em back out of sight! Hurry!"

The herd came on. In that narrow place, no swing men were needed; there was no way for the cattle to go but forward. The long-legged leaders were striking straight down Wallace Draw, and the rest followed, the herd still in good order. And at last came the drag, with fourteen men whipping with the loops of their ropes. Tonto saw Marvin McLeod, white with dust, peer forward, wondering where his two point men had gone.

Tonto charged forward. So did the rest; they made a formidable-looking crowd, and there were surprised oaths from those men at the drag. Panic showed on their faces as they wheeled their horses—only to stop. A cordon, headed by Newt Britt and Curly, was drawn across the break, safely sheltered behind rocks. They were shooting furiously, but high, and between those echoing cliffs it sounded as though there were more of them than of those in front.

Not a shot fired by McLeod's men—not yet. Tonto waved his crowd back, and rode alone straight into the encircled group. He spoke grimly, and they knew he meant it.

"You're under arrest, all of you. For God's sake, don't any of you go for a gun! If you do, I couldn't stop those men; they'd want hangings—and they'd have them."

They looked dazed; all this had happened in seconds, and they'd been given no time to think. One spoke.

"Will you let us talk it over, Tonto?"

He reined back out of hearing distance. Very soon they called to him, and he rode in again.

"As an Arizona Ranger, will you promise us protection if we give up?"

"I will! I can hold them, if you don't start anything. . . Drop your g ns, dismount, walk out onto the flat with your hands up."

They did, and the others came crowding men inely in on them. Then the thing came that Tonto f ared. One of the men with him—a lanky, wild-eyed Texan—spat out:

"Hell, let's string the lot of 'em up!"

Tonto rode up to him, looking him bleakly in the eye.

"Sure, Tex—but you shoot it out first with me. Want to do that?"

He heard a voice behind him, Ike Brady's, quiet.

"You shoot it out with both of us, Tex. How many more are with Tonto and me?"

Curly and Newt were, instantly, and Wes Carmody. And a large majority followed these. It seemed that only two or three hot-heads disagreed, and they were far outnumbered. Soon the captured men were tied in their saddles—a more dejected-looking crowd Tonto had never seen. Where was Pierce's influence?

The next part had already been decided; now that they were ready for it, they put the finishing touches on it: Twenty men were to take the prisoners to jail—twenty pretty hard men, and twelve were to remain and ask to be made special deputies to guard them until the trial. Ike Brady was the leader of these. Little chance of a rescue from the jail!

Tonto and Wes watched the cavalcade start off. Already the others were re-gathering the cattle, to drive them back to their own range. Carmody mopped his forehead with a red handkerchief.

"Tonto, I never even hoped it would go so easy! Nobody hurt but that Injun."

"They had nothing else to do. Too many of us against them. But if one fool among 'em had drawn a gun—" He did not need to finish.

"This," said Wes slowly, "will ruin Pierce—sixteen of his gang."

Tonto shook his head. "I wish it would! I'd put it at maybe half ruining him. We've got to watch him, Wes! Clever as he is, all I can guess about his next trick is that it will be something very different from this. I don't think Pierce is licked yet."

They started together, in a slow walk, after the herd. Now Carmody saw Tonto's lined face, his weary eyes.

"Tonto," he said kindly, "you git on home and git to bed. I didn't realize how you been pretty near killing yourself, on the go day and night. We've plenty of men to handle the herd."

"Thanks, Wes—I will. Wish I was there right now!"

Chapter Sixteen

MORE than a week passed. Tonto had been taking it slightly easier since the recapture of the herd. Today he sat in his bedroom working on a letter which called for thought; a firm but courteous letter to Governor Carson insisting that his status as a Ranger be clearly and unmistakably defined. He was thoroughly sick of his dubious standing. . . . There came a knock at his door, and Nell's voice:

"Tonto! A man to see you."

Her tone was peculiar. He put down his pen and walked out to the living-room. Captain Saunders stood there! He had a friendly smile on his face—but his eyes were cold and expressionless, as usual.

"Why, hello, Tonto! How are you?" he greeted.

"Fine, Captain. How're you?"

Tonto introduced him to Nell, and the three talked a short time; then she made some excuse and strolled out. Saunders looked as nearly genial as Tonto had ever seen him.

"Tonto, I've some good news for you: You probably know I've been getting in a word for you with the Governor every chance I saw. I think it's finally having effect. I believe I can promise you a lieutenant's commission again inside of two or three weeks."

"Good! I've been hoping for that a long time."

But, oddly, Tonto did not look nearly as excited as one might expect. He was afraid there might be some catch in it. There was, and presently it came out.

"By the way," asked Saunders casually, "what moves had you planned to make here next?"

Tonto considered.

"I haven't any plans, Captain. I'm stumped for the moment, and wondering what to attempt next."

"That's fine!" Saunders looked relieved. "Then you won't mind so much. The Governor has ordered me in here to take charge personally, and he wants you to go down to Yuma—there are several matters there that badly need looking into immediately. Will you be able to start in the morning?"

There came a very long pause, and Tonto spoke slowly.

"Captain, I've had a tough job here, and worked hard at it, and I'm just beginning to see my way out of the woods. I'd like to stay to see the end of it."

"I know—I understand how you feel," said Saunders sympathetically. "You've done fine work! But—the Governor's orders. I think, to compensate you, I'll even risk going a little beyond the Governor's orders, and make you acting lieutenant for the Yuma district right now—till we get your full commission straightened out. As I said, that shouldn't take over a couple of weeks, once you're down there."

Tonto slowly rolled and lit a cigarette, thinking.

"Another thing, Captain: I'm president of the new Cattlemen's Association here. The Rangers would positively have to have its help, they're such a small force, and so much against them."

Saunders nodded assent.

"I've been inquiring around. It seems to me that Wes Carmody could take charge; I hear he's a good man. Of course I'd back the Association fully with the Rangers—so we could work together, I'd like to have you put me up for membership before you go."

Tonto was silent. Saunders looked at him and went on.

"In fact, if Carmody **should** be scared of taking the lead, I'd do it myself in your place; I think the Captain of Rangers should be a suitable man, and that I'd get the office if you'd recommend me for election."

For a time Tonto sat carelessly looking into Saunders' face; it was as hard to read as his own. Finally he asked:

"Isn't there any possible way of leaving me here for the present?"

Regretfully, Saunders shook his head.

"I'm certainly sorry, but it's the Governor's orders."

Tonto sighed and knocked the ashes from his cigarette.

"Well, then, there's only one thing left for me: accept my resignation, beginning now. I'm not leaving here."

"Not—leaving!" Saunders looked positively startled. "But man, your standing in the Rangers! And a commission promised to you within a matter of days!"

He looked entirely nonplused; he had believed that Tonto would do anything to regain that commission—he would have, two months ago or so. Saunders began to look angry.

"But damn it, man, have sense! Certainly you can't let us down that way. How about discipline—a Ranger can't honorably quit whenever he takes the notion—how about all the trouble I've gone to, helping you?"

Tonto shrugged uncomfortably.

"I'm a cattle-man now; that's where I get my bread and butter—since you and the Governor didn't see fit to put me on the payroll. In fact I've considered myself as helping the Rangers, rather than as a real Ranger myself."

By this time, Saunders' cheeks were flushed slightly, and his oddly dark blue eyes inclined to snap—the first time Tonto had ever seen expression of any sort in them. And he spoke half angrily.

"Tonto, you know the bad name you have—thrown out of the Rangers once. You don't know how hard I've worked for you with the Governor, to get you back in. Is this all you'll do to return my friendship?"

"Yes," sighed Tonto, "it does sound ungrateful."

"All right! Let's go at it this way: I won't order you to Yuma; I'm asking you, as an old friend, to go there. Believe me, I know what the set-up is as far as Governor Carson's concerned, and I know what's good for you."

Quietly, doggedly, Tonto spoke.

"Sorry—but I'm staying here, and that settles it."

Saunders sat looking at the floor a long time. At last he shrugged, wryly

"Very well. I'm sent here to take charge, and I have to do my duty. You know well where a thing like that Association always ends up—shooting, lynching: a cattle war. If I can't direct it, I must ask you to dissolve it before trouble comes up, and let the Rangers handle things here; I'm getting several in to help me."

Tonto straightened up in his chair.

"Captain," he said grimly, "I wish we could get together on something or other, but it seems that we can't. The Association is not going to be dissolved. I'm a private cattle-man now, and you have no right to give me any orders whatever so long as I obey the law. And there's certainly nothing illegal about cattle-men getting together to protect their own interests."

Saunders stood up quickly, his eyes snapping.

"All right! If you insist on being so stubborn—and in going against all your own interests and my friendship—I'll have to warn you that I must place you under arrest the first time your Association resorts to force in any way. In fact, I may yet have to arrest you if somebody swears out a warrant for some of your previous actions here; I've had a hard time overlooking them—in many respects you've seemed more like a gunman than a law officer."

Tonto also got up. Quiet though his face and voice were, he too was losing his temper. He spoke coldly.

"Captain Saunders, arrest me whenever you find good reason. Right now, I have work to do down at the corrals, if you'll excuse me."

He strode through the door and out. He was standing with Nell near the corrals when he saw Saunders mount and ride away.

Tonto looked down at her, and his eyes half closed. He even grinned very faintly.

"Nell, I've come to the conclusion that a red head often covers quite a lot of brains."

"And I've guessed for a long time that you knew something you've been keeping back from me."

"No." He spoke very slowly, looking at the ground. "No, I didn't know anything. A man shouldn't go to spouting too much when he has only suspicions so vague that he won't even admit them to himself—except to tell himself he's crazy, and cuss himself for having them."

"Tonto," she asked suddenly, "are you sending a copy of your resignation directly to the Governor?"

He hadn't thought of that; he considered it a moment.

"Not yet. I'll wait two or three days and see if something doesn't happen—I might hear from him yet."

Exactly what he expected to happen, he did not know. But he had to wait only until that same afternoon. He was outside the house when he saw two horsemen approaching. He recognized them some distance off; two of his old Ranger companions, Tom Harrison and Jerry Keene—Keene was a sergeant, but with the usual Ranger informality he or the others hardly ever bothered to mention that. Tonto walked out to meet them, away from the house. They greeted him with quiet friendliness—he had always been about the best-liked man in the force—and swung from their saddles to stand with him.

"I don't suppose," remarked Keene, "you happened to see anything of Captain Saunders around this neck of woods?"

"Yes, I did. He left here just before noon. You fellows working with him?"

"Not exactly. The Governor told us to catch up with him if we could, and send him in right away to talk to him about something important."

"Well, he was heading west, leaving here." He paused and asked diffidently: "The Governor—I don't suppose he said anything to you about me?"

"Why, yes. He told us that if we happened to get up into the Palpai country, we should do whatever you say, since you're in charge up here. He sent you a note."

Keene fished it from his chaps pocket, and Tonto took it eagerly. It was no more than three or four hastily scribbled lines.

Tonto—nice work! I mean your burglary—herd thing too. Afraid, from the tone of your letter, you recognized that writing. Too bad. *Carson*

Tonto's brows puckered, but he made no comment on the note; he folded it and thrust it away.

"Come in and have something to eat before you go on."

They were hungry and glad of the invitation. Tonto put their horses in a corral and fed them before walking with the two to the house. While they ate—Nell waiting on them hospitably—he sat at the table with them, sipping coffee but saying little. When they were through, he went with them back to the corrals, and picked up his rope to catch his own horse.

"I think," he remarked, "I'd better go with you a way. This country's pretty rough and thinly settled, and you might have trouble finding him unless we track him far enough to be sure how he's headed."

"We?" Sergeant Keene chuckled. Tonto was the tracker, and that was what had got him into the Rangers in the first place, though once in, he had far more than made good otherwise. "I was just going to ask you if you wouldn't start us off right."

Having saddled, Tonto loped up to the house to inform Nell where he was going. She stared at him.

"But I thought you'd quit the Rangers!"

"I thought so too. I can't explain now. I might have some news for you when I get back."

The Rafter Bar range was so nearly denuded of cattle that few had been down to water, and Tonto could still find an occasional print of a horseshoe on the trail by which Saunders had left. This made for simple tracking, and for a mile or two the three rode together, not hurrying. Again Tonto was silent, sunk in his thoughts. And then his hand tightened on the reins as some casual chat of the other two came to him.

"Say, did you recognize that gray-haired man leaving the Governor's office as we went in?" This was Keene.

"I'd seen him around earlier. Malone tells me he's Barry Drew, the big handwriting expert from San Francisco. Wonder what he's doing around?"

"That's what I was wondering. Some forgery, I suppose; nothing that concerns us, or we'd have heard of it."

Their talk drifted to other things, and Tonto pushed out ahead. Barry Drew—he was famous throughout the West: not only could he identify handwriting, but he had an uncanny knack of convincing jurors that he was right; he could have been a noted trial lawyer if he had chosen that profession.

TONTO COUNTED the days back. Yes, if the Governor had wired as soon as he got that letter Tonto sent him, Drew could easily have been in Phœnix before those men left. And certainly it would be just like the efficient Governor Carson to call in the best expert witness, and not rely on the more or less amateur opinions of local bankers or such. Had that penciled writing at the foot of the mining company's letter been definitely recognized? His scribbled note from the Governor hinted that it had.

With a start, he came back to the present. The cow trail was playing out until now it had grown faint; and his horse, unreined, was still jogging along it. It took only a glance to show that there were no prints of horseshoes ahead. Sheepishly, Tonto stopped.

"I'm afraid I've overrun. We have to turn back."

He had to take some kidding about that; Tonto's making a blunder in tracking was too good a joke to overlook. But they had returned less than a quarter mile when suddenly, crossing a stony place among tall, dense cedars, he swerved off at a right angle.

"Here we are; he's turned north."

Keene looked startled.

"Now, why should he have headed off that way all at once—here? Looks like he's trying to hide his tracks."

"Well," remarked Harrison, "we've all done that plenty. He may want to sneak up on somebody. Sure a good thing we have Tonto along; we couldn't have found that turn-off in a year—we've missed many an arrest over a thing like this, since Tonto left us."

Tonto pushed on ahead, his lips tight. These tracks of a shod horse were comparatively simple for him, even here, but he pretended intentness on them as an excuse for not talking.

AT THAT, IT DID TAKE a certain amount of concentration to follow the doubling, twisting trail without overrunning again. But Tonto had years ago found out that there was one almost invariable characteristic of a white man trying to hide his trail: the man would go to extreme precautions for a couple of miles or so, and then, feeling quite sure that nobody living could follow him, strike straight out wherever he was going. An Indian, on the other hand, would keep up his caution until the very end, which made things much more difficult.

Sure enough, in only a mile and a half, the trail he was on now suddenly left the stony bed of a wash and he could plainly see it far ahead, crossing a level sandy draw and heading up a bare ridge. The two Rangers looked completely mystified. Sergeant Keene shook his head.

"It beats me! I can't figure out what he's up to. Can you, Tonto?"

"I might guess," he answered shortly, "but the guess might be all wrong. We'll likely find out before night."

From here on, the trail was easy. They went mile after mile until, a little before sunset, Tonto held up his hand to stop the others. They were going through a pass in a divide, through thick piñons. He rode cautiously forward until he could peer through the screen of branches, and the others did the same.

"Why," grunted Harrison, "there's a ranch down there and sure a fine-looking place! Whose is it?"

"Wyatt Pierce's Broken N," answered Tonto shortly.

"Pierce's—huh!"

Watching them, Tonto saw astonishment come to their faces. Astonishment, and was there a faint trace of something else? Harrison spoke, quietly.

"Now, what do you suppose he's doing down there?"

Tonto shrugged.

"Everybody knows Pierce is a lawbreaker—kingpin of the lawbreakers—even if we haven't been able to prove it yet. Captain Saunders might be sizing up his ranch."

"Sure!" agreed Keene quickly, but his tone was peculiar. "And isn't that his horse out in the pasture? The Captain must be staying all night. Well, should we go down?"

Before he could answer, Tonto took the glasses from the cantle of his saddle and looked through them; yes it was unquestionably Saunders' horse, drifting slowly out from the corrals into the horse-pasture. He lowered the glasses.

"I'd rather not have too many Rangers poking around down there, to put Pierce on his guard. How about coming back to the Rafter Bar and staying all night? You can go on tomorrow and catch up with him somewhere else."

Keene thought it over briefly.

"If it's all right with you, we'll stick around here awhile, and camp somewhere close tonight—we won't let ourselves be seen. We'll drop over to your place tomorrow."

So it was settled. With hardly another word, Tonto turned and rode away alone, back toward the Rafter Bar.

Chapter Seventeen

AFTER breakfast old Dave got Curly to hitch up the buggy and drive him to Rock Tank, four or five miles off, on a trip of inspection. The other three boys were out looking after some cattle. So it came that there was nobody but Nell and Tonto at the ranch when Saunders rode up.

He greeted them pleasantly and swung down.

"Come in," invited Nell, and added: "I'll get out of the way; you two will want to talk business."

"No," said Tonto, "you come in with us." He turned to Saunders. "I told her about your wanting to transfer me to Yuma."

Something about the way Tonto and Nell stood side by side made Saunders look at them hard, and then he smiled faintly—one of his hard, frozen little smiles, meant to be pleasant.

"I think I understand, Tonto. You keep no secrets from Miss Holt, do you?"

"But he certainly does!" exclaimed Nell. "He's had some secret or other on his mind a long time that he won't even hint to me."

"I told you once," retorted Tonto quietly, "that I have no business talking of guesses I make, till I can prove them right. Come in, Captain."

Saunders hung his gun-belt on a peg by the door, and they went in and sat down in the living-room. He came straight to the point.

"Tonto, I apologize for losing my temper yesterday, though you're about enough to try the patience of Job himself. After thinking it over, I refuse to accept your resignation. You can't quit and leave us in a tight spot—we need you too badly."

So! Or had he, since yesterday, received fresh instructions to get Tonto out of the country?

"But do you need me here?" asked Tonto evenly.

Saunders threw out his hands and turned to Nell.

"Let's see you use your influence on him, Miss Holt. This ranch of yours—honestly, can you make a decent living on it?"

"Not now," she answered.

"So I'm offering him a commission as Lieutenant of Rangers in charge of the Yuma district. There's a good salary, and I'll do my best to secure his back pay for all the time he's been up here. Also—" He hesitated, looking at the floor. Suddenly he raised his face to her with an appearance of frankness. "Now, this is strictly confidential between the three of us: I'm planning to resign my commission as Captain of Rangers very soon. With Tonto as lieutenant, in good standing again, he'd be the logical man to succeed me—the only one, in fact."

He paused to let it sink in, his eyes on her. He looked as nearly genial as he could.

"A man," he went on meaningly, "could support a wife very nicely indeed on a Captain's salary. Besides which, there's a certain amount of honor to the thing—social standing. Any woman likes that."

"Oh, I don't know!"

Nell shook her head slightly, and smiled, dismissing it as nonsense.

A slight look of irritation crossed Saunders' dark face.

"Well, then, let's get back to the matter of a Ranger's duty—if he's not a quitter. I'm ordered in here, with half a dozen of my men following me, to take charge. And Tonto refuses point-blank to go where he's badly needed! I don't understand it. What logic is there in that sort of conduct?"

He looked at her challengingly.

"Please," said Nell quietly, "leave me out of this; it's between you and Tonto. I never did believe in a woman making up a man's mind for him—not that I or any other woman could make up Tonto's."

Saunders' irritation with both of them was obvious.

"But don't you want him to go? To get a Captain's commission in a short time?"

"No," she told him, in one blunt word.

"I'm glad of that!" drawled Tonto. "I don't want to have to go against her, and I'm not budging from here till this row is over."

Once again Saunders' face was turning that dull red.

"And you refuse to break up the Association?"

"I do!"

"You're forcing me," said Saunders dangerously, "to do something I don't like—after our long friendship."

"Well, do it," said Tonto curtly.

Slowly, Saunders drew a folded paper from his pocket. He tossed it across the table. Tonto picked it up and barely glanced at it; it was a form he knew well.

"A warrant for my arrest. Sworn out by Wyatt Pierce. What charges?"

"Your shooting-scrape with Deuce Willett; I shouldn't have even considered keeping you in the Rangers after a disgraceful affair like that. Why, it was a piece of plain bravado—your posing as a bad man, and meeting Willett on the street to shoot it out."

"That," agreed Tonto mildly, "is one way of looking at it. There's another, but I don't suppose you want to hear about it."

"No. It's a matter for a jury now. I'm informed there are plenty of witnesses to prove that you deliberately provoked the fight."

Tonto laughed harshly. All witnesses had been Pierce men.

"Plenty of them is right! How do you intend to take me to jail—through Palpai?"

"Certainly. I'm following the straightest road out."

Tonto tossed the warrant back across the table.

"Afraid I can't risk that. *Of course* you wouldn't know anything about it, but the Palpai crowd would just love to get hold of me—the best I could expect from them would be shooting, instead of lynching. Sorry, Saunders, but I can't go with you."

"Resisting arrest?"

"Exactly. Your move."

"Very well, Tonto! I've never let a prisoner bluff me yet; I must do my duty, one way or another."

The table was light, frail. Suddenly Tonto flipped it up on the side next him so that it came between them. And then, as it toppled sidewise, he had Saunders by the wrist. A short struggle, and he tore the derringer from the man's hand, to toss it through the window with a tinkle of broken glass. He stepped back.

"Saunders, you're a dirty dog! A murderer's gun—not an honest Ranger's. Come on, Saunders; here's where one of us takes a licking!"

The man had courage enough; he ran in. And then they were battling furiously across the floor. They fought in silence but for their heavy grunts as they struck blows, took them.

NELL STOOD SCREAMING, her clenched hands up to her face—she had never before witnessed a murderous, deadly fight like this; she had not realized what wild beasts men could be when they were crazed with rage.

Presently Saunders seemed getting the better of it: some blow had weakened Tonto for the time. Even in her panic, Nell saw Saunders' eyes leave Tonto's for a flash and go toward the open door as though measuring the distance there. What he wanted came to her suddenly—to dart out and seize his gun hanging there!

Choking with panic, she whirled and dashed outside, to seize the belt off the peg. She could not let either of those madmen get his hands on it! What to do with it? She ran down the steps, almost falling.

And then she saw the two men coming slowly riding down the ridge; they were perhaps a third of the way

down. She flung her hands beseechingly toward them and screamed:

"Hurry! Oh, hurry! They're killing each other!"

They heard her. They came down like a whirlwind, rounded stones kicked up by their horses' hoofs bounding ahead. She waited, and from behind her, in the house, came grunts, thuds, the stamp and shuffle of feet.

"What's wrong?" demanded one of the riders.

In a daze, she saw them fling themselves from their saddles before their horses had stopped. Not two of her cowboys, as she had thought—it was those Rangers who had been here yesterday.

"Hurry! They're killing each other!" she repeated.

They went running up the steps, across the porch, guns drawn. Keene brought himself to a sudden stop in the doorway, and Harrison pushed in beside him.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Keene. He shook his head. With big, scared eyes, Nell stood staring at him. Sergeant Keene looked more inclined to grin than anything else. What savages men were!

Then it came to her suddenly that the sounds in there had stopped. Was one dead—badly hurt? She ran up and to the door, her face pale. She saw Tonto standing in the middle of the floor, his clothes torn, his face bloody. But he was grinning—grinning! He turned to her and said in a matter-of-fact voice:

"I feel better now!"

"What happened, Captain?"

Keene had crossed the floor and taken hold of one of Saunders' arms, to help him up. For a moment the man could not speak; he was badly dazed, shaking his head. Then he pointed.

"That paper on the floor!"

Puzzled, Harrison stooped and picked it up, unfolded it. He started—then handed it to Keene.

"A—a warrant, for Tonto! Sworn out by—Pierce!"

Saunders' breath was returning. He tried to look calm.

"Yes! He resisted arrest. Handcuff him, men!"

The two Rangers looked dully at each other. Keene took a half-hearted step toward Tonto, one hand going to the leather handcuff pouch at his belt. But he stopped.

"Good God, Tonto! I'd rather do anything than—What's the trouble, anyhow?"

Saunders turned on him furiously.

"Arrest him, damn it! I've given you your orders."

Again Keene went forward, and his hand fell on Tonto's arm—gently. Tonto turned and spoke quietly.

"Sergeant Keene, I order you to arrest Captain Saunders."

Keene let go of Tonto's arm, and his jaw dropped. Things were coming too fast for him! What sort of deal was this, anyhow? Saunders' hard, dry voice cut in:

"Arrest *me!* *You* give them orders! Why, you're no officer—you're no Ranger at all. Even if you hadn't resigned, your standing in the force was irregular."

Tonto nodded. It is easy for the winner of a fight to become calm first.

"I understand all that. And I know, too, why you didn't give me regular standing: you'd found out that Governor Carson had been investigating certain things—my dismissal—and you were afraid of what he'd turn up if he kept on. Saunders, you sent me in here with only one purpose: to have me killed. Well, you failed!"

He turned back to the Rangers.

"What," he demanded, "were your orders from the Governor—the real head of the force—when you came up here now? Who were you told to obey?"

Harrison's eyes strayed wildly. He was caught in some row that he did not understand, though he might have suspicions. And whichever way it turned out, he was very likely to get in trouble.

"Why—why, we were told to do whatever you said." That sounded too vague. "So maybe I'd better—"

"Wait, Tom!" said Keene. He stood a moment. His eyes would go to Tonto, back to Saunders. At last he went on: "Well, if somebody's going to be fired because of this business, I reckon one of us will be enough. As sergeant, I take the responsibility. Captain,"—he sounded scared as he said it,—"I place you under arrest." It was easy to guess from his face that his old liking for Tonto had made him choose that course.

He started toward Saunders—and Saunders made a mistake: he struck at Keene, and Harrison came running in. There was a short scuffle, a double click; when they backed off, Saunders was staring wildly down at his wrists, which were close together. Quietly, Tonto approached. He reached out and tore the badge from Saunders' shirt, a shred of cloth hanging from it.

"You've disgraced this long enough!" he said, and he put it in his pocket.

Now, in his rage Saunders' eyes looked coat black.

"What, may I ask, are the charges against me?"

"I think you know! We have plenty of evidence, but I'm not telling you anything, to put you on your guard, until you're officially questioned." He turned from him. "I'm going to clean up, and then I'll help you fellows take him in."

He'd have to, or undoubtedly Saunders would talk them into liberating him before they went very far. Also, he'd have to be there to explain.

Washed and with clothes changed, Tonto returned to the living-room. Only Nell was there, the others waiting outside for him.

"Nell," he asked, "will you have the boys pass word around that I've gone away with Captain Saunders? Might remark that you heard us talking about going to Yuma. If Pierce thinks I'm out of here for good, he won't be so likely to start something in a hurry, while I'm gone. And he'll be off guard when I get back."

"I'll tell them, Tonto." She evidently was about to say something else; he waited. "Tonto, you know Saunders talked as though he thought we were engaged." She colored faintly.

He spoke gravely, looking down into her eyes.

"We seem to understand each other pretty well without many words, Nell. Don't you know the—the only reason I haven't asked you long ago is that I felt I had no right to, till all this row is over?"

She came a little closer, looking up at him, and her voice was very low.

"I thought so, Tonto. But can't you understand that if you're in any danger, there's nothing I'd rather do than share it with you, all I can?"

His arm went gently around her shoulders.

"You would feel that way! Nell, you're a brave little devil—and loyal. But— Well, it'll soon be settled now, one way or another. I hope to be back here within a week or so. 'By, Nell."

He turned and hurried out.

Chapter Eighteen

NCE more it was past midnight; again Tonto rode quietly through the dark and silent streets of Phœnix. Opposite a large house set far back on a broad lawn, he stopped and dismounted, tied his reins to the low iron pillar at the curb. He turned up the walk, and reaching the house, pulled the handle of the doorbell. The Negro maid opened the door.

"The Governor in, Aroma?" he asked politely.

"I dunno, suh. Yo' name, please?"

"It's not necessary; he's expecting me."

"Oh, yo' the man he's 'spectin'. This way, suh."

Again that long, carpeted hallway. Again the door opening, to show the brighter light of the study. But

now Governor Carson met him, his hand out. He looked weary—a scandal in his administration was a blow.

"How are you, Tonto?" He turned. "This is Barry Drew—you've heard of him."

So this was the famous Drew—a mild, gray-haired little man with a fatherly look. Only his eyes, oddly sparkling and bright, hinted of his quick wits. They all sat down. The Governor lit a cigar, and sighed heavily.

"Did he break?" asked Tonto.

GOVERNOR CARSON shrugged, and with a movement of his eyebrows passed the question on to Drew. Drew turned his chair to face Tonto more.

"No. His kind rarely does. But he decided to make a full and complete confession, to save his own skin; his kind always does—cold-blooded; doesn't care a hang about his associates."

Tonto shook his head.

"It's a bad blow to Ranger prestige—the Captain himself. What ever got him into such a thing?"

"Money—covetousness. He'd made a fortune—if he'd only got out in time. We've found that he's been banking an average of more than twenty-two thousand in Albuquerque, under another name."

Tonto whistled. But there was one thing worrying him; he had talked it over with the Governor the night before.

"Has he given evidence enough to incriminate Pierce—to convict him in spite of the smart lawyers he can get?" He knew enough of courts to realize the loopholes that existed in them for one with money. Saunders' lone word against Pierce's—not so good.

The Governor answered:

"I'm afraid not. But there's another chance, and it's up to you—again."

"What is it? You know I'll do my best."

"Saunders assures us that there are plenty of papers in Pierce's safe to incriminate him—not the big safe in the bank, but the smaller one in his private office. But there's a catch in it: did you notice if the heating-stove in Pierce's office was standing? Saunders says it is."

"Why, yes, it was—I wondered why he didn't move it out of the way for the summer."

"Because on a second's warning, those papers can be stuffed into it. I understand that it's kept full of shaving and chips. One touch of a match—and there you are: nothing left. He would have a trick like that up his sleeve!"

"And you want me to try to get hold of those papers before he can burn them? It sounds pretty hopeless!"

Carson came erect in his chair, his jaw hard.

"Is it any more hopeless than what you bucked into, going up there in the first place? And you've been gradually getting the better of that whole crew of them. Yes, Tonto, it's up to you."

Tonto rolled and lit a cigarette. He sat thinking, the other two watching his face intently. At last he nodded.

"I'm getting a plan that may work—it needs thinking out."

"I told you so!" The Governor brought his first down on the table and looked triumphantly at Drew. He must have been doing some bragging on Tonto's abilities. "You'll try it?"

"Oh, certainly! I have to, as a—" He stopped suddenly. "But *am* I a Ranger?"

Governor Carson settled back in his chair, his jaw firm and his eyes narrowing. He puffed his cigar a time or two, and he spoke.

"Tonto, I suppose you'd expect me to recommission you as a lieutenant?"

"Well," said Tonto mildly, "I'd like it, of course."

"Sorry." Carson spoke harshly. "It can't be done. Nor, in fact, can I even see my way to appoint you a Ranger private, so to speak."

Tonto's face hardened. What new shenanigans were being tried against him? He spoke very quietly.

"Governor Carson, would you mind giving me your reasons for that?"

"Mind? Hell, no!" He leaned forward and jerked a drawer of the table open, pulled out a long, heavy brown envelope. "Read this, and perhaps you'll see why I can't make you a lieutenant."

With stiff, slow fingers, Tonto took the envelope and pulled out what was inside. The paper blurred before his eyes, and his jaw dropped. He jerked his face up, to see Drew smiling, the Governor chuckling at his little joke.

"You mean—I'm—you've made me Captain!"

"Good Lord, man, why not? You have an excellent record as an officer of the Arizona Rangers, not a blemish on it. And, good as the others are, none of them have quite what one needs for leadership. So—what do you mean to do next, Captain Prescott?"

"Oh, by the way!" interjected Drew. "He should know that other thing we found out about Saunders: he's wanted back in Illinois on an old embezzlement charge."

Carson turned almost purple and smote the desk.

"I suppose I shouldn't speak of my predecessor in office, but I'm damned if I understand what sort of loose methods he used in employing men!"

"Saunders explained," murmured Drew placatingly. "Some faked papers, and recommendations."

"Why didn't he look 'em up!"

Tonto spoke hesitantly.

"Governor, I might suggest something, but I'm afraid you won't stand for it. Remember, first, that another scandal in the Rangers would about ruin our reputation forever; nobody would have any confidence in us."

"What is it?" demanded the Governor, tight-lipped.

"Well, if I could get that stuff in the safe—get enough evidence to convict Pierce—couldn't we leave Saunders out of the thing? We could send him back for trial on that other charge, and say nothing about it in Arizona; nobody here knows he's been arrested."

The Governor chewed his cigar, his eyes narrowing.

"We could. Only I wouldn't feel justified in doing it; it would look too much like trying to save my own political skin." He took the cigar from his mouth and knocked the ashes from it, stared at the ash-tray. He laughed bitterly. "Trouble is, I'm so unfortunate as to have a streak of honesty in me."

The notion was forcing itself more and more on Tonto.

"But," he urged, "saving the reputation of the Rangers would certainly be far better for Arizona than punishing him. We could say you found out that he'd had something to do with jobbing me, from jealousy, and fired him—that would square me, and not sound so bad for the Rangers. We could," he added, "make him sign over all that money to some charity before he goes; he'd do it, to get out of the charges here."

"If I could convince myself I wasn't doing it for my own sake—" the Governor began hestitantly.

DREW SPOKE IN HIS GENTLE, persuasive voice.

"Governor, will you leave it up to me, as referee? I've been around a good deal—courts and things—and I hope I have pretty fair judgment. I'd be a strictly disinterested party, and I'd vote as I thought best for the Territory."

Carson mulled it over. Finally he nodded.

"Very well! What's your advice?"

"Do as Tonto says. Without the Rangers having their prestige, I'd hate to think of the lawless condition of Arizona—it's bad enough now, but I'd expect great things of Tonto as Captain. Send Saunders quietly East, and let him take his sentence there."

Tonto hastened to speak, to take it for granted that this settled it.

"Fine! Now, about the rest of the Rangers—where are they? Scattered all over the Territory, as usual?"

"I've called them all in; they're in Phœnix."

"Well, would you leave word for all of them to meet me out by Willow Springs after dark tomorrow night—and say nothing about it. Tell 'em to have blankets, and some provisions." He stood up; it was very late. "That all, Governor?"

"All but one thing—swearing you in."

"I was wondering about that. How do we manage it? I don't want to be seen around here—I'm in Yuma, you know."

"You're staying here till tomorrow night—take the second room on the right down the hall, and keep out of sight. I'll hide your horse in my stables, and I can get a notary in tomorrow. Anyhow, I want to talk things over with you some more in the morning."

Tonto was leaving the room when he turned back, and drew from his pocket the badge he had taken from Saunders, the shred of cloth still hanging to it.

"This thing—I forgot about having it."

Carson squinted at it thoughtfully, puffing his cigar.

"No, I won't get you another one! Put that one on—I know you'll shine it up."

And he chuckled at the double meaning of his words.

TONTO AND CURLY reined their horses slowly up the steep side of Piñon Peak, not far from the ranch; they were almost on top.

"Curly," said Tonto, "I just got a letter from Hank Willoughby, the man you rustled those few head of cattle from—I didn't tell you that he's an old friend of mine. I'd written and told him you weren't mean, that that was only a fool kid trick, looking for excitement. He says he'll call the charges off if you'll start paying a little every month to make it up. How about it?"

"Huh!" Curly's eyes lit up. "Say, will I ever! I found out as how that thing of bein' on the dodge aint what it's cracked up to be—by a long shot."

"And I was thinking maybe—that is, after I get settled down to this Captain job and see where I stand—I might be able to use you in the Rangers. The rest of 'em haven't always been angels, either; wings might be in the way at their job."

"Oh, good Lord, Tonto!" That was his way of saying that this was entirely too much to expect. "The Governor—"

"He said he'd leave it entirely up to me, if I'd be responsible for your conduct."

Tonto stopped on the summit and swung from his horse.

"Well, here we are!"

There was a round stone fireplace already built and filled with fine dry wood, and a pile of green twigs lay close by. He stooped and shoved a lighted match under. He stood waiting until it got blazing its hottest and piled the green stuff on, swept his slicker across quickly.

Carefully he slid the slicker on and off. The dense smoke rose in short black balls—the Rafter Bar signal. He kept it up steadily until the smoke was whitening again, then sat on a boulder to wait.

"Thar she blows!" exclaimed Curly, who had been reading a whaling story in a magazine the night before.

One after another, answering signals were springing up, some fairly close, others faint and distant.

Tonto got up and going to his horse, swung on.

"This," he said, "is going to be a busy night at the ranch; there'll be a crowd coming. Good thing the boys offered to help Nell make coffee and biscuits for 'em!"

At near noon next day, Wyatt Pierce rode down the street of Palpai on his fine light sorrel with the flowing mane and tail. Pierce had a headache, but he did not mind at all, for he'd got it from an all-night party to celebrate Tonto's being out of the country for keeps, going to Yuma. He dismounted and beckoned to a man standing in the Agency door.

"Here, Jake, take my horse to the livery. Lead him; don't ride him."

He paused on the board sidewalk, lighted a cigar, and looked up and down the street with satisfaction. Palpai—his town. He was king here. Tonight there would be that meeting of his chief men. They'd decide how best to get those sixteen out of jail. And the quickest way to get rid of Wes Carmody; he'd have to smash him quick, as a lesson to others not to take sides with some upstart who came drifting in here.

The little Rafter Bar? Oh, that could wait—merely an old cripple and a girl. He went in through the bank door, nodded benevolently to the pale-faced clerk, went through to his private office.

Two shabby cowboys came strolling in behind him to the bank; one of them had a dog-eared check in his hand and timidly went up to the grille.

"Uh—can you-all cash this-here?"

The clerk picked it up with the quick scooping motion of practice and glanced at the back.

"You'll have to endorse it—pen over on that desk."

The man crossed to the desk, and frowned. His partner strolled over to his assistance.

"Where do I sign it, Clem? Not here?"

"No—up on this end. Right across the end."

They were arguing it; they certainly were a green pair, to be that long endorsing a check.

Another man in cowboy dress came hurrying in.

"Mr. Pierce here yet?"

The nearsighted clerk peered at him. Why, it was that fellow they called Tonto Jim. He had orders to notify Mr. Pierce immediately if he saw him.

"Yes. I'll see if—"

"Don't bother. I want only a word with him."

The clerk ran his hand under the counter, feeling for the bell. But even as its faint tones came out to him, Tonto was opening the office door. Crossing to it, he had hastily pinned a badge on his shirt pocket, a badge that said: ARIZONA RANGERS—CAPTAIN.

"Up with 'em, Pierce!" he said evenly. "You're under arrest."

Those two green cowboys had slipped in after him, and they had drawn guns. There was something going on out in the Agency—shouts, a single shot. And there were running horses in the street, yells of excitement.

The color went slowly from Pierce's handsome face. His eyes flicked to the small safe in the corner, which he had opened hardly two minutes before. He kept his hands on the desk, waiting. And at last the Agency door burst open. But two of those who came through wore Ranger badges, and the third was Curly Johnson, a Rafter Bar hand.

"Did you ring, sir?" asked Curly respectfully.

"All right, Pierce!" said Tonto. "We've taken over the town—Rangers and Association men. Stand up."

PIERCE HAD MEANT to shoot it out, against any odds, if a thing like this ever happened. That had been easy to look forward to—hard, now, to do. Six against him in here. A sudden move, an— No show whatever; Tonto had worked it too fast. He rose; the two Rangers ran their hands expertly over his clothes, disarming him.

But Pierce was magnificent in this moment of defeat.

"You win, Tonto!" He laughed, and it almost sounded as though he meant it. "I've been a gambler most of my life, and I know how to lose." He seated himself on the edge of the desk, one booted foot dangling, and reached for a box on the table. "Cigar, Tonto?"

A curious feeling swept over Tonto; it was almost pity. In short seconds, this man's whole world had come crashing about his ears, and still he could smile.

"Yes, I'll take it, Pierce. Thank you."

"And you're a good winner!" He held out a lighted match. He turned to where Sergeant Keene was on his knees by the open safe. "You'll find what you want in the lower right-hand corner; the rest wouldn't interest you."

He turned back to Tonto, and read the lettering on his badge. So Saunders was no longer Captain of Rangers!

"He squealed?" he asked.

Tonto nodded. "Don't mention names, Wyatt." And suddenly he decided the best way to handle this was to be frank. "If there's enough evidence here, we'll leave him out of it; we can handle him otherwise."

"Oh, there's plenty here! None of my business—he could only make it worse for me."

Tonto left the others to guard him and hurried out to the street. Down through the dust marched half a dozen disarmed men, hands in the air, with a little knot riding behind them, two of whom had Ranger badges—it looked very much as though they were driving a little bunch of cattle. A similar knot turned a corner further up. From out beyond the edges of town came a monotonous crack of carbines; fifty or more Association men were out there, encircling the place, to shoot ahead of anybody who tried to get away and drive him back.

Already the excitement was dying down; it had been planned thoroughly to the slightest move. A Ranger loped up to Tonto.

"I think we've got a clean round-up, Captain."

"Good! Take one more look around."

Presently began the weeding out. The old store building where Tonto had first met Curly was pretty well crowded with dejected-looking men, and back and forth among them the Rangers walked, studying their faces intently. Sometimes one would speak: "That's Wade Baxter, wanted in Cedar Springs." And one more would be led out and handcuffed, or his wrists tied with a pegging string. It seemed strange, in Palpai, that only a dozen or so of them were thus recognized. At last Tonto raised his voice.

"That's all! The rest of you can go. But I'm warning you that the Ranger identification files are being sent up here, and practically all the force is staying in Palpai for the present. So—use your own judgment about staying here."

They poured out to the street. Most of them just stopped on the sidewalk and beside it, inclined to joke with each other and with the Rangers; they were innocent men who had been caught in the dragnet, strange cowboys drifting through, and such. The others tried to hide their haste as they strolled to their horses and rode away.

A BUGGY STOOD ACROSS the street, an old man and a girl in it. Tonto crossed over.

"Well, Dave, it turned out a lot better than I'd hoped for. I was pretty scared of letting you and Nell come in to watch. Only one man shot!"

"Oh—only one!" Dave sounded very disappointed.

Tonto laughed.

"Palpai's going to be the cleanest town in Arizona from now on; a crook will be scared to come within twenty miles of it. Don't you think so, Nell?"

She was flushed with excitement, her eyes bright.

"Tonto, I think you're wonderful!"

He laughed again. "That wasn't what I asked you about!" He reached up and took her hand. "Well, we've had some tough times together, but—"

He stopped. His eyes had fallen on the bank window a few yards off. Inside it stood Pierce, calmly smoking his cigar as he watched them.

"Excuse me, Nell. I want to talk to Pierce. I don't suppose it'll work, but—"

He hastened off. There were three Rangers guarding Pierce, lounging in chairs with their high heels hooked over the rungs. Pierce came slowly to meet him, his hand out.

"Congratulations, Tonto—and not on the raid."

With a queer feeling, Tonto took the hand.

"Pierce, you can't mean that."

Pierce laughed, and flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Of course not. If I had my way, you'd— Well, you probably understand my feelings."

"Tell me," asked Tonto, "how it happened that you had only one letter from Saunders, in his writing—that about the Eagle Gold Mining Company? We found no others in your safe today."

Pierce started slightly.

"What do you know about that? Where did you get it?"

"I was the Indian who broke into your house that night. Found it where it had slipped behind your desk."

Pierce puffed his cigar, a queer smile on his face.

"Slipped—one single slip, and you had to find it. If I got any others from him—remember, I'm saying *'if'*—I burned them immediately. But I suppose there always is one slip, no matter how clever we think ourselves." He was silent a moment. "Oh, by the way! That roll of bills you got on my desk—about six hundred, wasn't it? Of course you kept it?"

NOW IT WAS TONTO who smiled oddly.

"I did. We used it for expenses for the Rafter Bar. Without that, we couldn't have stuck it out—we'd have been broke, forced to quit."

"'The mills of God—'" Pierce took his cigar from his mouth and laughed.

Looking at him, Tonto suddenly blurted:

"Will you go a little further with being a good loser? Will you sell me the Broken N? For cash?"

Pierce raised his eyebrows.

"Cash! Surely rangering isn't that profitable."

"No, but I've found a bank in Phœnix that—with the Governor's help—I talked into backing me. It'll pay you cash, and I'll pay it back; my salary will keep up a lot of the payments. Well?"

Pierce puffed his cigar, his eyes narrow.

"Why not? I'll need ready cash for my trial—I happen to know what lawyers are. Sit down, Tonto; we can at least talk it over."

For once, Tonto was close to hard-boiled. Not everybody, he pointed out, would have the Broken N for a gift; with the bad name it had, if it were in weak hands, its neighbors would flock onto it like vultures and soon pick it clean.

"But," said Pierce with sarcasm, "nobody would dare rustle cattle from the Captain of the Arizona Rangers. Or even," he added, "from Tonto Jim!"

"Exactly," agreed Tonto bluntly; he would be polite only in so far as he could make a good bargain too.

But business of this sort was a strain on him; he was not used to it—did not want to become used to it. He looked pretty tired when he went back to the buggy and laid the deed in Nell's lap. Her mouth flew open; she stared from him to it.

"The—the Broken N! Yours!"

"Well, leave the *Y* off that last word and you'll have it right."

"Why, Ton-*to!*"

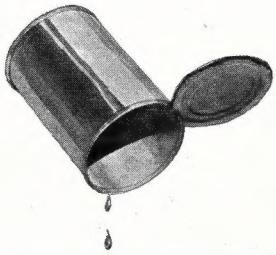
Old Dave was looking up into the air, a knowing little grin on his lined face.

"You know," he ruminated, "Palpai's a right pretty town, with all them cañons an' ridges around it, an' up high enough not to get too hot in summer. Only one thing wrong with it now."

"What's that?" asked Tonto unsuspectingly.

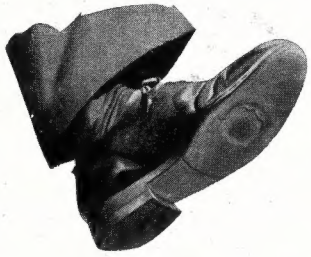
"They run the preacher out, an' we'll be a few days gittin' another in here. Uh-huh—somebody might be needin' a preacher for somethin' right soon."

Use it up . . .



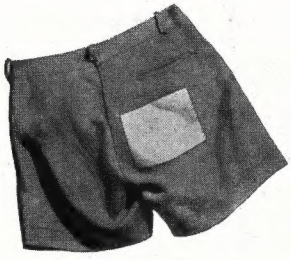
That's the thing to do in wartime. Eat every bite of food, save every scrap of soap, make a patriotic habit of stretching all the supplies in the house so they go further, last longer.

Wear it out . . .



This year old coats, old shoes, are a badge of honor. They show you're sensible enough to know that one way to help win the war, to keep prices down, is to wear your old things out!

Make it do . . .



Before you spend a penny in wartime, ask yourself, "Do I really need this? Or do I have something now that will do?" As you patch and darn and turn, you're keeping prices down.

or do without!

When you put your money in War Bonds, savings, taxes, insurance—you're putting your money to work fighting the war and building a sound, stable nation for the peace to come.

It's your money you're saving when you help keep prices down. For it's buying too much when there's too little to buy that sends prices up. And when prices go up—and keep going up—your savings, your future, are in danger.

How can you help keep prices down?

By never spending a thin dime you could turn into a War Stamp. By thinking twice—and thinking "No"—at every urge to open your purse.

By wearing old things out, making makeshifts do. Remember, it's the things you *don't* buy that keep prices down!

See that prices go no higher . . . Be a saver—not a Buyer!

HELP US KEEP PRICES DOWN

A United States war message prepared by the War Advertising Council; approved by the Office of War Information; and contributed by this magazine in cooperation with the Magazine Publishers of America.

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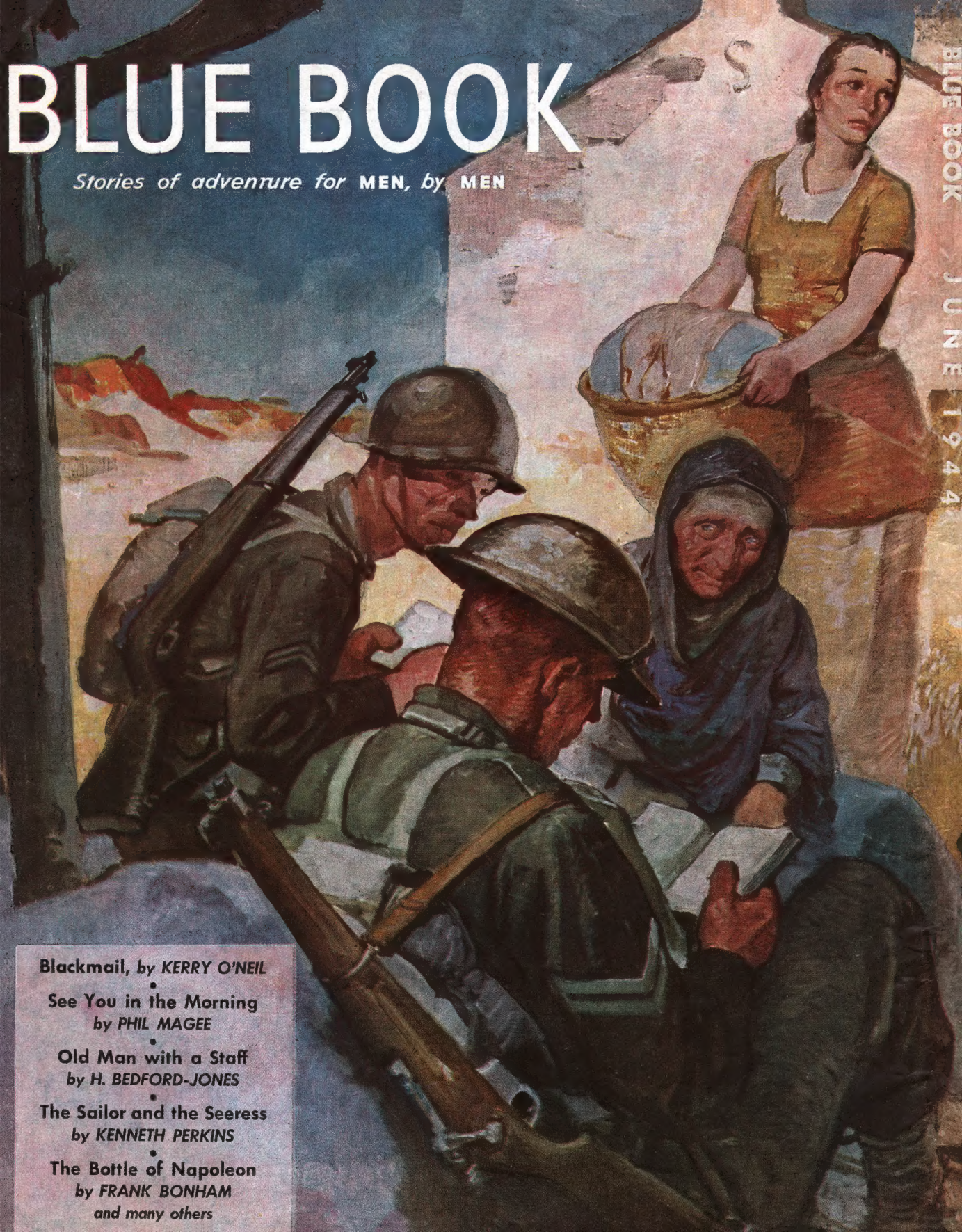

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